

北山結莉

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✻ 偽りの王国

精霊  
幻想記

【せいれいげんそうき】





「あ、あんた！  
待ちなさい！」

どうしてこんなことになったのだろうか？  
そんなことを考えながら、  
リオはただひたすら歩き続けていた。  
するとその時、すぐ近くから  
誰か幼い少女が叫ぶようにリオに声をかけた。







# 精霊幻想記

【せいれいげんそうき】



「俺にはセリア先生がいますから」

「え、あ、その……」

セリアはとたんに恥ずかしくなったのか、顔を真っ赤にして俯いてしまった。





# Credits

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# Synopsis

**A**makawa Haruto is a young man who died before reuniting with his childhood friend who disappeared five years ago. Rio is a boy living in the slums who wants revenge for his mother who was murdered in front of him when he was five years old.

Earth and another world. Two people with completely different backgrounds and values. For some reason, the memories and personality of Haruto who should've died is resurrected in Rio's body. As the two are confused over their memories and personalities fusing together, Rio (Haruto) decides to live in this new world.

Along with Haruto's memories, Rio awakens an unknown "special power", and it seems that if he uses it well, he can live a better life. But before that, Rio encountered a kidnapping that turns out to involve two princesses of the Bertram Kingdom that he lives in.

After saving the princesses, Rio is given a scholarship to the Royal Academy, a school for the rich and powerful. Being a poor orphan in a school full of nobles turns out to be an extremely detestable place to stay at.



# Prologue

In a world somewhere far away, that wasn't Earth.

The young boy knew.

There was no such thing as salvation in this completely rotten world.

The strong exploited, and the weak were exploited.

That was the irrational rule of this world.

Days of rummaging through garbage, begging to others, being beaten by violence, and being forced to be an accomplice in crime.

The young boy was abused like a slave continuously. His mind had already started wearing down a long time ago.

But even so, the young boy couldn't help but crave. He wanted to live. There was a man who he had to kill no matter what. If it was for that sake then he would even slurp muddy water to survive.

Clinging onto such a wish--.

Inside a gloomy, small room.

The sunlight shining in from the window faintly illuminated the inside of the room.

Inside, the room was filled to the brim with a smell that was like rusted iron.



Corpses were scattered about, the floor was wet with blood, and a single bag was located at the corner of the room.

Yes, it was a bag that looked just about the right size to fit a child inside--.

“Nn! N, nnnn! ”

The bag squirmed. A muffled voice could be heard from inside.

The throbbing of the young boy’s heart wouldn’t settle down.

The young boy held his breath, and with a trembling body he hesitantly approached the bag and untied the string.

The bag’s mouth was opened with a rustling sound. Sure enough, inside it was a really cute girl wearing a beautiful dress that resembled a priest’s outfit.

A little girl with long and wavy light purple hair and purple eyes.

*Aa, just as I thought.*

The young boy knew.

This kind of world--.

Had no salvation.

# Chapter 1

The place was Japan. It was a story that had already started many years ago.

The summer sunlight, which was glaringly pouring down, was scorching the asphalt that day.

A young boy and girl were experiencing a sad separation in a certain residential area.

“Haru, I don’t want you to go!”

Beside a parked truck, that was used for moving a house, a little girl was crying while clinging to a young boy. Her name was Ayase Miharu. At this time she was still seven years old.

“Mi, don’t cry. Surely we will be able to meet again, okay?”

The young boy, who was hugged by the girl who wouldn’t stop crying, was talking stout-heartedly.

The young boy’s name was Amakawa Haruto. He too was still a seven-year-old child at this time.

After this, Haruto had to go to a faraway rural area with his father.

It was unclear when he would be able to meet with Miharu next. After all, at present, there was no plan to return back to this place.

Haruto’s parents were divorced. It seemed his mother and his little sister would stay behind and live together in this town, but the rented apartment room where Haruto and his family were living had already been vacated.

Haruto’s father and Miharu’s parents were staring at the two from



afar with expressions that couldn't endure seeing the scene.

“I don't want, I don't want you to go. Haru! ”

Seeing Miharuru crying while pleading so that he wouldn't go, Haruto wanted to cry too. But, there was no way he could cry. Because he absolutely didn't want to show his weak side in front of Miharuru.

That was why he desperately acted tough saying baseless things like “It will be fine” or “We will be able to meet again” while trying to stop Miharuru's crying. Even though he actually felt so frustrated and empty that he also wanted to cry loudly.

Haruto loved Miharuru. Miharuru loved Haruto too.

It was unclear whether the encounter of these two was fate or an accident. Both their parents moved to a newly built apartment building that had just been leased, where-in their rooms were neighboring each other. Thanks to both families having a child that was born in the spring of the same year, the situation somehow developed where the two families got along well with each other.

Haruto and Miharuru were given their name because they were born in spring(haru). Both of Haruto's parents were working at the time, so Haruto often got entrusted to Harumi's house.

Like that, the two had been raised together since they were babies. If the relationship of the two had to be expressed in words, the words "childhood friends" would be fitting.

That was why, since the two of them became old enough to understand what was going on around them, it might have been inevitable for the two of them to be attracted to each other.

At the time they didn't understand the meaning of words like love or romance, but for the two of them, they really felt that each other was a special existence for them. Something like the reason of love or impetus, whether those things existed or not, didn't matter for them.

They simply loved each other, being engrossed in each other.

“Haru, Haru. Stay together with me.”

He wanted to make Miharu stop crying somehow because Miharu getting sad would also make him sad.

But Miharu showed no sign of stopping her crying. She was bawling while clinging to him. Haruto didn't know what he should do.

He wondered just what could the current powerless him do. He who was unable to prevent the separation from his beloved childhood friend--, thinking that, Haruto clenched his hand tightly.

Haruto would be happy if he was able to stay together with Miharu.

However, the current Haruto was unable to make that come true. Because he was still just a kid.

Then he swore that he would make it come true someday. He wanted to stay together with Miharu forever; he wanted to walk at her side forever. That was why he would convey his feelings. That was the only thing that the current him could do.

“I'll go to meet Mi when I get older! That's why, that's why let's get married at that time!”

Haruto squeezed out all the courage he had and declared the confession of the lifetime to Miharu.

“Like that, I can be together forever with Mi. I'll stay at your side forever and protect you even if I die!”

Haruto yelled. \*Thump, thump\*, he could hear the loud beating sound of his heart.

“...Is that, no good?”

Haruto asked with a trembling voice.

Miharu had stopped crying before he knew it, and she looked up at Haruto's face in a daze.



“Okay. Okay. I’ll marry you Haru! ”

She answered like that after some time, and then she made a smile so lovely it looked dazzling.

Haruto felt happy seeing that, and he swore he would absolutely fulfill this promise.

He didn’t care how long it would take. He would protect it, this smile. He made that oath, gave a small kiss at their parting, and then Haruto and Miharu bid farewell.

That was a fleeting and transient promise between little children that held no binding power at all.

A promise of children who didn’t know anything about what kind of future would await them--.

But that promise was certainly carved deep inside Haruto’s heart. It continued to greatly support his life from then on in a foolishly straightforward way.

After that, the young Haruto dreamed of being reunited with Miharu and decided to earnestly continue working hard. He wanted to meet Miharu. If it was for the sake of meeting Miharu then he couldn’t just stand still. Anything was fine, as long as he worked hard and grew more and more, the time of their reunion would be quickened. That was what he believed.

That was why Haruto diligently studied with all his effort, helped with his home’s housework and farming, and recently his strict grandfather had unusually taught him an old style martial art in order to train his spirit.

Perhaps it was thanks to that that Haruto grew to become an honest and serious person.

Perhaps Haruto's feelings, who continued to work hard without wavering, had reached his father because his father allowed him to enroll into a famous high school in the town where he once lived together with Miharuru.

As the result, Haruto accomplished a shocking reunion with Miharuru at the high school where he enrolled. Was it the mischief of fate, or just a simple coincidence that Miharuru was also enrolled in the same high school as Haruto? They were in different classes, but Haruto was shocked when he saw Miharuru's name in the name list of the class division and he spontaneously stiffened.

And then, his eyes were stolen when he saw the school uniform figure of the grown-up Miharuru. There was no way he would mistake her even when she had grown up. After all, even though they were far away, she was someone who he had treasured all this time, really close to his heart.

Glossy black hair that stretched straight until her back, well-featured looks, white skin that looked as though they had a coating of snow, a petite body but with a balanced nice style. She looked somewhat reserved, but she possessed a graceful and neat atmosphere that would charm those who looked at her.

Miharuru had truly grown into a beautiful girl that was worthy to be depicted in a picture.

Haruto felt joy at the fate that allowed him to be reunited with his beloved childhood friend. He certainly felt the loud beating of his heart. But, at the same time, he also received a strong shock.

There was an unknown young man beside Miharuru.

The young man who he didn't know was talking intimately with Miharuru. Seeing that, Haruto felt somewhat nervous, and he was unable to call out to Miharuru at the school entrance ceremony.

That day, after going home, Haruto was worrying by himself.

It wasn't like it was set in stone that just by getting reunited with Miharuru the promise in the past would be realized unconditionally no



matter what.

But for Haruto, his memory with Miharu was special. Exactly because he had his promise with Miharu was he able to walk straightforwardly until now without hesitating.

That was why when he thought that Miharu might have completely forgotten about the promise with Haruto, and he had lost his place to belong in the past, he fell into an illusion as though he had completely lost his path.

Perhaps they wouldn't be able to return to their relationship like in the past. Perhaps Miharu had another person who she liked. Perhaps he was an idiot for dreaming of his own accord.

But even so, Haruto wanted to try meeting with Miharu.





He decided that he would summon his courage tomorrow for sure.

And yet--,

Miharu completely disappeared from before Haruto.

She was absent from school for a while since the day after the school entrance ceremony. Then she had suddenly dropped out of school as though she had disappeared from the face of the Earth.

There were also other students than just Miharu who also dropped out similarly, it became a bit of a commotion inside the school, but the school used the protection of private information as a shield and didn't talk at all about the details of what happened.

Haruto, who was nothing but a high school student at the time, was unable to do anything significant. Only the time passed while he was unable to obtain any hint--. Haruto grew to harbor a feeling of shame.

Why didn't he call out to Miharu on the day of the school entrance ceremony?

If he called out to Miharu at that day, at that time, there might be a different future than now. It was a what-if story, but he couldn't help but think that.

Only regret remained, and Haruto's feelings toward Miharu soon became twisted as though in a bind.

He couldn't give up. He didn't want to give up. Soundless screams of sorrow were echoing inside his body.

He received confessions from the opposite sex several times, but when he imagined a future where he entered that kind of relationship with a woman other than Miharu a hard to describe feeling of guilt and avoidance surged in him.

On the other hand, it wasn't like he was able to do anything in order to search for Miharu--.

Losing sight of the path that he should walk on, Haruto was growing apathetic little by little.

And then, more than four years had passed since the day Miharu vanished completely.

Currently, Haruto reached twenty years old and became an adult. He was about to be a second-year student in a university at a metropolitan area.

But Haruto's time stayed unmoving. He was attending university, but he didn't put his best effort into his study, he didn't have anything he wanted to do, and he was only doing part-time work in a café that was a bit stylish.

In the morning he woke up, went to college, did part-time work, and went home--he passed every day only following the inertia without any variation.

Seen from the side, it might be a common college student life, but they were days that were only that. He continued to wander aimlessly and simply passed the time without any change at all in his world. Even today--was how it should have been.

The season was at the peak of summer. It was like that day during the summer when he parted from Miharu, the sun that was floating in the transparent blue sky was brilliantly illuminating the asphalt that was covering the ground.

But in contrast with such fine summer weather, Haruto was making a somewhat cold face while boarding a bus from a bus stop that was near his campus.

Perhaps it was because of how early in the afternoon it was, but the number of passengers riding the bus was few. Passengers were getting on and off sporadically, but now there were only three passengers--the university student Haruto, a female student who was enrolled in

the school that was attached to Haruto's University, who seemed to be coming home from her club activity, and an elementary school student--inside the bus.

Other than the announcement, that would sometimes sound, the sound of the engine was the only noise that could be heard inside the silent space. The bus was shaking while Haruto was staring out at the flowing scenery.

*...Hm?*

Suddenly, Haruto noticed glances that were directed at him. The girl who seemed to be an elementary school student was sitting at where he felt the gaze was coming from.

*That girl is...Endou Suzune, was it?*

Haruto had an idea of who this girl was. Before, while she was coming home from school, she was sleeping on the bus and missed her stop. She didn't understand where the bus was going and broke out crying. He then paid for the bus ride back and walked her home.

Whenever they were riding on the same bus like this, he would feel the gaze toward him come from Suzune, so her impression remained in his mind somehow.

It seemed Suzune noticed that Haruto returned a gaze back at her because she hurriedly averted her gaze away and looked down.

*Did I, do something...?*

Even while thinking about it, not a single thing came to mind.

That was only natural. After all, he had talked with Suzune only once when he was helping her. At that time when he walked her home her mother had also said her thanks to him, so he didn't think that there would be any problems.

'Is it just my imagination?' --he thought of trying to ask her, but if it was actually just his misunderstanding, he might be treated as a dangerous person. The awareness of crime prevention for children

was high in recent times.

*Calling out to an elementary school girl inside a bus, that would look really suspicious no matter how you look at it right?*

‘Yeah, let’s not do that’-- somehow it felt vexing, but Haruto made a small sigh, and he intentionally chased out the gaze that he felt from Suzune from his mind.

“Tsu!”

Then, at that time, the bus suddenly shook greatly.

He felt a sense of weightlessness as though he was soaring in the air and a strong impact that assaulted his whole body. Haruto’s body was sent flying, and he hit the ceiling rather roughly.

“Tsu...hha...”

There was pain throughout his body. He couldn’t breathe well.

His whole body was hot as though he had just gotten showered with boiling water. His consciousness was rapidly getting hazy. The inside of the bus, that was squashed terribly, was reflected in his sight as it was getting dimmer and darker.

*An... accident?*

His consciousness was getting terribly faint, but he somehow understood.

He might be dying. Even though his whole body should be in pain, his senses were vanishing. He clearly sensed the footsteps of death approaching him. Then, Haruto immediately felt sacred.

“ua...gahah-gaha”

He tried to open his mouth by squeezing out his remaining strength with all his might, but what came out wasn’t his voice but a cough that was mixed with a large amount of blood.



*Mi-...*

Inside his heart, he tried to call the nickname of Miharu in the past. A streak of tears spilled out from Haruto's eye, and it assimilated into a puddle of blood. Just as it seemed as though Haruto's consciousness was going to cut off completely,

--'Haru.... .....me.'

It felt like a beautiful voice resounded inside Haruto's brain.

Right after that, a gigantic circle of geometrical shapes surfaced on the ground while emitting light--.

“The next news. Today, at 15:23, a traffic accident occurred between a bus and a medium-sized truck that crashed into each other at the street of ○○ district, Tokyo Metropolis. The three passengers of the bus died in this accident. Although the drivers of the crashed truck and bus were seriously wounded, they miraculously escaped from death. It is suspected that the cause of the accident might be the truck's driver sleepiness--”

# Chapter 2

It was the year 989 of the Holy Calendar.

The Strahl region, on the west part of the Yufilia continent, was home to the royal capital of the Beltram Kingdom, Beltrant.

A mother and child were living happily in a small house even though it was just a modest life. The mother was an extremely beautiful and lovely woman while the child was a young boy with an androgynous and cute face that resembled his mother.

On a particular day, when the bright spring sun was pouring down.

“Say, Kaa(mother). Why is the hair of me and Kaa black? It’s only us who got a different hair color than the people around here?”

The young boy peered into his mother’s face with his russet colored pupils as he asked.

In the royal capital, where the two of them were living, people with black hair couldn’t be found at all. Due to that fact, the hair color of these two was thought curious, even by the neighborhood. The mother made a slightly troubled face.

“About that, Rio. It’s because your father and I came from a faraway place, I think?”

She answered so after a bit of pause.

“The people who are living in this faraway place all have black hair?”

“Yes, that’s right, it’s not just you and me. The color of your father’s hair was also black, and the hair of your grandpa and grandma were also black.”

When the young boy who was called Rio asked in puzzlement, the mother answered with a gentle smile.

Rio responded to that happily with an innocent smile. For Rio, who was still five years old, his mother was his everything.

“Hee, someday, I want to meet with Grandpa and Grandma.”

“...Right. When you are older, I will take you to meet them. That place is called the Yagumo region you know? ”

The mother looked slightly troubled before she changed her expression into a smile and replied.

“Really? It’s a promise okay? ”

“Yes, it’s a promise.”

Two years later, year 991 of the Holy Calendar, spring had just begun.

There was a young orphan boy who was living in the slums of the royal capital, Beltrant.

At a corner of a dark, cold, arid, and dirty wooden hut lay a young boy who was groaning as though a nightmare was tormenting him.

“Haa, haa...”

The young boy, whose cheeks appeared red, was breathing roughly. The shabby clothes that looked like old rags that the boy was wearing were wet with a large amount of sweat. Just from a glance, it was apparent that the boy had a fever.

There were traces of multiple people living inside the shabby hut, but at present, there was no one who was looking after the young boy. It was unclear just how long this boy had been sleeping alone like this.

The boy was lying down on the cold wooden floor with only a

single thin sheet covering him. It wouldn't be strange if he died as long as he kept being neglected like this--.

However, at one point a warm and gentle light started to shine, enveloping the body of the boy.

It was different from the oppressive heat that was tormenting the boy until just earlier. It was a warm and pleasant sensation that would make one unconsciously want to entrust their body to it.

The complexion of the boy's face was starting to get noticeably better. Before long, his breathing began to stabilize too. The fever that was attacking the boy's body was receding for some reason. Then the light enveloping the boy suddenly vanished.

"Nn..."

The boy faintly opened his eyes after some time. He blinked while facing upwards and slowly started to move his gaze around, but there was only the gloomy wooden ceiling reflected in his sight.

His consciousness was still hazy as if a mist was covering it. He had no leeway to think properly. The fever had receded, but because his body had been weakening until just now, it seemed that his mental strength and stamina hadn't recovered.

He was suddenly assaulted by a heavy weariness while looking up dumbfounded at the ceiling.

When his mind had recovered enough that he was able to think, he grew curious at what kind of situation he was currently in. He whipped up his body, which was still slightly languid, and lifted up his upper body.

"Tsu..."

Perhaps because of the fever, or maybe because he was just sleeping on the hard floor, the joints of his body felt a dull pain. The boy grimaced.

When he ran his gaze around him, he noticed that there was some



shabby furniture placed at the center of the dim room.

*This place...*

The boy thought that he was familiar with this room.

But at the same time, he was feeling a discomfort that was hard to describe. Even though he had a feeling of déjà vu, like he had been living here all this time, it also felt like he was seeing it for the first time.

Even though it was impossible, it was as though he was sharing the awareness of two different people--.

Something felt contrary and just couldn't fit, or rather, his memory somewhere wasn't clear. The boy was looking around the inside of the room absentmindedly.

Then a sour smell pierced his nose. Almost at the same time, he noticed the ragged clothes enveloping his body were soaked wet with sweat. He frowned unpleasantly.

Thanks to that, his brain was stimulated enough, and his consciousness started to wake up. The boy took a deep breath, then with a thud, he entrusted his back to the ground and lied down. He felt like lying down for a bit more.

The boy went to move his hand to cover his eyes, but in the next moment he gasped and began to stare hard at his hand. That hand was certainly his hand. A small hand of a seven-year-old child.

But it was strange. Something was strange.

He endured a fresh headache while pondering with his blurred train of thought.

*A child's...hand? I'm.... No, I'm?*

Rio--that was the boy's name.

He was an orphan living in the slums of the royal capital of the

Beltram Kingdom. He was living in disgrace and suffering until today with only the purpose of taking revenge on a certain man allowing him to continue.

That should be how he, the human called Rio, was and yet--.

And yet, why was there a memory of another person inside his head? The memory of a human living in a completely unfamiliar world with a developed civilization that he didn't know at all--.

Memories of various sights were going on like a flashback inside his brain intermittently. The memories had a sense of realism that was unthinkable just to be a wild delusion that was unconsciously made by Rio, who was only seven years old.

The life of a human called Amakawa Haruto who was living in a completely different world than him--. According to that memory, he was a twenty-year-old man who was attending a university. No, even now the boy--Rio had that awareness. Yes, he could feel it as though it was something that only happened just now.

Feeling an unknown eerie feeling, Rio strongly shook his head left and right.

*What am I thinking? Amakawa Haruto?*

His overlapping memories were confusing.

Rio was staring in bewilderment at his own hands as though to escape from reality.

The skin of his hands wasn't clean, just like a child who lived in Japan during the period of starvation. The hands were too thin from malnutrition, the skin was rough and dry, and furthermore, they were dirty with filth.

Naturally.

According to the memory of his orphan self, it was because he had never taken a bath all this time.

*Seriously...*

Rio grimaced at this extreme lack of hygiene.

He was only wearing ragged and stiff clothes made from linen, and he had forgotten when the last time he had washed it with water was. And of course, there was no way he would have anything good like socks or shoes.

Even so, perhaps he should be thankful that he at least had cloth on his body. His unkempt hair was damaged, but it was easy to see that it had a black color.

“...Suu, haa”

For the time being he took a deep breath and calmed down his heart, then Rio tried to sort out his own memories and situation. He put his hand on his mouth and took a thinking posture.

He was Rio, but then he was also a university student named Amakawa Haruto--it should be so. He had the memory of living for seven years in this Beltram Kingdom until now, and then the memory of twenty years living as a Japanese student.

Although his memories were overlapping, the current Rio wasn't Amakawa Haruto.

If he was Amakawa Haruto, his current self shouldn't be a child. Besides, there was no way he would be in this kind of place. After all, if his memory was correct, it was unthinkable that Amakawa Haruto would be alive.

“The me in my memory rode a bus and died...right? ”

He remembered that while riding the bus, a strong impact had assaulted him which caused him to feel pain, throughout his whole body, as if he had been in pieces. He couldn't remember anything at all about what happened after that, but it was hard to think that he would have survived from that.

“Then right now what am I? Is this a dream? The afterlife? A

reincarnation? ”

He tried saying out loud the possibilities that came to mind.

However, through this sense of reality, and the vivid surroundings, it was unthinkable that what was currently occurring was just a dream.

Besides, he couldn't imagine that this place was the afterlife--heaven or hell. No, he did know that he was placed in an environment that was remarkably similar to hell though.

In that case, was he reincarnated? Rio thought suspiciously.

Was such a fantastical event possible? Did the person called Amakawa Haruto really exist in the first place? Was the memory residing in his brain the real thing?

There was no way the answer would come just from thinking about it, and there was no way someone else could tell him the answer. What he did know was that currently he was Rio and wasn't Amakawa Haruto.

Regarding his memory and personality, at first his thoughts were in chaos, but as more time passed, what made up Amakawa Haruto was fusing with the current Rio and forming a single consciousness.

The memory and personality of the two people came to the surface, but perhaps it would be okay to consider them to be mixed with each other without any contradiction.

Due to Haruto's longer life experience, that part was expressed out denser, but he could naturally accept that Rio was Amakawa Haruto and Amakawa Haruto was Rio.

That was why he was able to perceive both memories as his own experience, and it didn't look like he was going crazy. Discomfort would well up if he thought deeply though, it was a really mysterious feeling.

But more importantly than that the current problem was--.



\*Guu\*, a large sound similar to that of an empty stomach rang out inside the room.

He then felt depressed from the sudden feeling of terrible hunger.

From the feeling of emptiness in his stomach, he felt light anemia. Rio sighed wearily.

Was the memory of his previous life the real thing or not, and if it was the real thing, how was he reborn here? Why did he recover his memory now? There were various things on his mind.

Because he understood completely that the answer wouldn't come no matter how much he thought about it though, Rio shifted his thoughts to think about how he should break the deadlock of the dangerous situation he was put into right now.

He was only able to think calmly like this because of the personality and memory of Haruto that had intertwined with his. If Rio had just stayed as Rio, then he wouldn't have had any vision at all about the future ahead of him. Only to await a fate of dying a dog's death as an orphan.

That would be the worst future. Rio had an objective that he had to accomplish no matter what, and that was why he must not die in this kind of place.

*If I die, that man...*

Rio recalled the existence of the man who he had harbored hatred against all this time, and he gritted his teeth.

Rio's father died soon after he was born, and his mother was killed not long after he became old enough to be aware of his surroundings. Since then he has been living in this slum that was like a heap of trash.

Rio's parents were immigrants from a faraway foreign country. The two were traveling as adventurers while making a living, but when his mother, Ayame, was pregnant with Rio she temporarily retired from the adventurer business. Naturally, earning their living

became entrusted to his father, Zen, but it seemed Zen, who was a skilled adventurer, died not long after Rio was born.

Even so, Ayame stoutheartedly continued to raise Rio. If she economized her daily expenses, then she would be able to live modestly even while raising a child.

However, the peaceful life of these two met its end when Rio was five years old.

Ayame was a beauty that was overflowing with a foreign atmosphere. She had a child, but she had a youthful look that caused the men around her to send her vulgar gazes.

That was why Ayame, whose weak point was the still young Rio, was easily swallowed by the malice of the environment. She was tragically killed in front of Rio.

Rio clearly remembered that time. Since then, he survived while thinking of taking revenge on the person who murdered his mother.

Even now, despite the memory of Haruto having entered, that sense of vengeance was still strongly carved in Rio's heart. But the current Rio also happened to have the sense of value that belonged to the human named Amakawa Haruto.

Certainly, the person who murdered his mother was hateful, but the sense of value that Haruto instilled in him was feeling avoidance toward that revenge thinking that perhaps revenge was an unforgivable evil.

Rio's own sense of value was strongly blazing with the thought of revenge, however. Just by recalling that man's existence a muddy and black emotion was welling up inside.

*Revenge is evil? What naivety is that...*

Rio clicked his tongue at the conflicting feeling whirling inside him, and frowned--it was then that the door of the hut was opened roughly.

Rio forced his exhausted body to wake up and turned his gaze toward the door.

Just then several people and a woman entered inside the hut in succession.

“Hm? What, Rio you little shit, you woke up huh.”

The man who was standing in the lead said that when he discovered Rio, who was alone inside the gloomy room. Rio knew this man.

“Rather, you are still alive. I thought you would be dead already. Big bro, that brat Rio is alive yeah? I thought with how he looked he was going to go for sure.”

After the man opened his eyes wide in surprise, he talked to a large bodied man behind him.

“Hah, this brat’s got the devil’s luck huh? Even though yesterday he couldn’t even stay on his feet from fever. I was going to throw you away if you fell asleep.”

The large-bodied man who was called big bro spoke in admiration.

“...Yes. Somehow I got better.”

Rio forced his face from scowling reflexively and replied.

These men were a group who would take any job while throwing their weight around the slum. They earned money by doing activities meant for outlaws and dirtied their hands by doing any crime requested of them. They really would do anything for money.

Human trafficking, trade of prohibited goods, assassination, thievery, fraud, blackmail, dealing with or transporting stolen goods, etc.. The number of crimes they handled was innumerable.

From the viewpoint of these men, the orphans of the slums could become conveniently disposable pawns. That was why they often casually picked up some orphan and treated them however they

pleased without any regret.

Rio too was picked up by these men like that and made use of. He was living together with them inside this small hut. Whether sleeping or awake, he was passing his days in terror through the unreasonable treatment from these men.

He would sometimes get beaten up as an outlet to vent, made to participate in the crime they carried out, and sometimes he would even be used as a scapegoat, or a decoy, whenever their crime got exposed, and they were escaping.

It felt no different from being a slave. Even so, he couldn't survive without relying on them, so it was an unreasonable world.

Rio was surviving by obeying them, but he was only doing it through a type of desperation that could be akin to being lethal to him.

“Anyways, it's really cold. Let's have a toast and warm up already.”

An underling loudly stated while putting food and alcohol on the shabby wooden table that was placed at the center of the room.

“Yeah. Oi, put that at the corner of the room. It seems the contents is sleeping because of a drug, but careful not to wake it.”

When the leader gave the instruction, one of the underlings answered “Kay” and put the bag, that seemed to be filled with some kind of booty, on the floor.

After that, the men made the woman who had accompanied them pour them alcohol while appearing to be in a good mood. They then began to eat.

“Ten gold coins for this is really awesome ain't it, big bro?”

One underling spoke while laughing foolishly.

“Hmph, ten gold coins just for transporting that thing. The package mustn't be anything decent. I thought the inside was just a



slave, but perhaps it might even be a brat from a big shot noble.”

“Wait, what’s that? You guys are doing a dangerous thing again? ”

The woman who was pouring alcohol asked with a dubious expression.

“Well yeah.”

The leader embraced the woman and snorted with a fearless grin.

“Even so, ten gold coins for just doing a petty request is too good to pass up.”

“Yeah.”

After the large man drank his alcohol, he heartily tore into the meat he was holding. Seeing that, Rio gulped.

The content of their talk sounded dangerous, but right now Rio was hopelessly attracted to the food they were eating. It was evident that their job wasn’t anything decent, but if Rio helped out even a little, he should get a bit of the leftover.

But this time Rio was staying at home because he was sick, so the possibility of him getting food was low. As long as the men didn’t get any sort of whim--.

Until now the relationship between the men and Rio was straightforward.

The strong and the weak, the one who used and the one who got used.

He would be fed while he still had value to be used, but if that value were gone, he would be mercilessly discarded. In fact, Rio had seen several children who were abandoned just like that.

He had no intention to continue this relationship forever, especially after all this, but Rio was nothing more than a seven-year-old child.

It was unthinkable of him to run out from here without any prospect whatsoever and survive in the slums where the weak were the prey for the strong.

Especially since the smell of the food currently stimulated his empty stomach.

*I'm hungry...*

Right now that was all he could think of. He couldn't even muster up the willpower to plan.

He was listening to the men's conversation in a daze while leaning against the wall at the corner of the hut, resting his languid body. Then one of the underlings suddenly called out to Rio.

"Oooi, Rio, Rio."

"Yes."

"You got some strange smell there because of your sweat. Go wash your body. It makes the food and alcohol smell bad."

"...Yes."

He was holding hope that perhaps they would give him some food, but it seemed it was just a fleeting delusion.

The underling pinched his nose while making a gesture with his hand to shoo Rio away. It seemed the smell of Rio's body, from the feverish sweat, was worse than he thought.

"I'm sorry."

Rio bowed his head slightly and stood up with staggering footsteps. Even though he as Haruto didn't know anything about this man, he as Rio knew this man well, that was why it felt strange.

Rio staggered away toward the door of the hut.

"Rio, if your condition didn't improve I was going to sell you off to

a slave trader. You little shit, it's only your devil's luck and your looks that are nice so that you might get purchased for a good price."

The leader seemed to have gotten drunk, and he talked to Rio joyfully while laughing.

The underlings were also guffawing, though it was unclear what was so funny.

"Geez, please be kinder to the kid."

The woman who was pouring a drink looked exasperated while chiding the men, but Rio didn't turn around and went outside the hut. Just after closing the door,

"Rio."

The door was immediately opened and the woman came out. Rio turned around after hearing his name called.

"Go eat breakfast with this. You should be able to at least eat some hard bread and soup without garnish."

Saying that, the woman put three pieces of small bronze coins in Rio's grasp. This woman was a prostitute that the leader favored. She was also acquainted with Rio, and she had bothered with Rio like this several times before.

"...Thank you very much, Gigi. Is this really alright?"

"It's fine if you pay me back when you grow a bit older and earn some money."

The woman called Gigi smiled kindly when Rio spoke his gratitude.

"Haha..."

Rio laughed with a troubled look.

"I'm joking. I told you before, I have a niece around the same age

as you, and so I just cannot leave you alone. I'll also stop doing this work soon."

Saying that, Gigi shrugged her shoulders lightly.

"Gigi is going to open a shop together with her big sister Angela right? I will visit that shop someday."

Rio smiled softly and said that.

It was a story that Rio had heard from Gigi before. Gigi was working as a prostitute together with her big sister Angela while saving their money in order to open a shop someday.

Because he remembered that story, Rio planned to return the favor someday and he tried to bring up that subject.

"Your atmosphere feels like it has somehow changed!?"

Gigi asked him with wide eyes.

"No, I wonder. I don't really understand though..."

Rio was startled and he tilted his head in puzzlement a bit awkwardly.

"So you can also make that kind of expression. You have a nice face there, so it will be a waste if you look sullen like how you usually were."

"Err, yes. I'll endeavor to do that."

Rio timidly gave an affirmative response to Gigi who was in a good mood.

"Well, it's fine. Go. They will get angry if we keep chatting here."

"Yes. Thank you very much."

Rio bowed his head deeply before leaving and then walked away.

It was still early in the morning.

The slums had shabby wooden houses lined up in a disorderly state while also having a peculiarly stale air drifting in the area. Despite that, the morning sunlight showered downward and the morning air calmed down Rio's feeling just slightly.

The men had told him to wash his body, but there was nothing like a facility for bathing in the slums. If he were going to clean his body, then he would need to exit the slums and walk until there was a place that had a well.

The royal capital Beltrant was divided up into multiple blocks by the ramparts that were surrounding the castle. To be allowed to pass through one of the ramparts one needed to pay the toll.

Perhaps it was only natural that once inside the ramparts the livelihood was more abundant and the public order was also better. People who could live inside the ramparts were only those with wealth that surpassed a certain degree.

There was also the fact that the closer one lived to the royal castle showed the proof of just how affluent they were.

On the other hand, being able to come and go in the area outside the ramparts was completely free. The people who couldn't live inside the ramparts were living there, but the public order was terrible; however, it was different from the inside of the ramparts because this area was showing development.

The slums were at the outskirts of the area that was just outside the ramparts. Of course, it was free to come and go from there as well, but it was an area that had the worst public order, even because the area just outside the ramparts already had a bad enough public order.

It had become a kind of lawless area that the country had abandoned, and authority didn't reach. Except for the people who didn't have a choice but to live there and some exceptions, there was basically nobody who would even try to enter there by their own choosing.

Rio got out of the slums and managed to find a district with a well. He then quickly washed his body and clothes. Perhaps because it was early in the morning, but the number of people walking about wasn't that many.

Thanks to that he was able to use the well leisurely. Of course, he didn't have anything high class like soap, and the well didn't have hot water, but he could only bear with it.

He rinsed off his body and visited a stall on his way back to the hut. He gulped down some cheap hard bread with some soup, which had almost no garnish in it, then returned to the nearby entrance of the slums.

He found a random place where the sunlight wasn't obstructed and then crouched down on the ground quietly to wait until for his clothes to dry.

The season was early in the spring, so it was still in a period where it was a bit cold to spend time half naked. Furthermore, Rio had just recovered from a sickness, but because he was used to living in the slums, it wasn't to the degree that he couldn't endure.

The red light district was beside the slums. Because dawn had come, prostitutes and their customers could be seen going to their respective homes.

Although there were nearly no people who went home from the red light district into the slums, people from the slums who visited there were only the small-time crooks who happened to procure some money.

Because Rio wasn't particularly interested, he was staying still while thinking about how he was going to be living from now on.

Honestly speaking, Rio had no intention to continue living together with those men from here on. Even if he were to stay in that hut, it was obvious that the only future awaiting him there was to be used until he had no more value.

This world wasn't so kind as to let an orphan like Rio live by

himself while having no other obligations. The only way for the orphans who were living in the slums to survive was to scavenge for scraps, steal, or get worked hard by some violent bunch.

*Stealing is out of the question, if possible I want to get some kind of job but...*

There was a slim hope for that, Rio thought.

In this harsh society, it wouldn't be easy to find someone who would want to hire an orphan. As it was, orphans who were living in the slums were already being watched like habitual thieves in places like the market.

If finding a job could be easily done, then something like orphans wouldn't exist. Even if he were able to find a job, surely the employer would see how desperate he was and employ him with an absurdly low wage.

Was there something that he could do? Rio called to mind his special skills that might be useful. Although having called it special skills, the majority of them were things that he learned in the previous world.

Education at the level of a university student, a domestic chores skill that he practiced from living alone, and the various other skills that he cultivated from living in a rural area and from his part-time work. He was groping for a way to make use of those kind of special skills, but in his present situation, where he had no social status or connections, making use of what skills he had was extremely difficult.

In that case, he raised the option of doing something the dishonest way, but Rio, no, his Amakawa Haruto self who resided inside Rio, was harboring a feeling of avoidance toward criminal acts. It was naivety that he should have thrown away a long time ago if he was still the Rio from before.

But it was already too late to feel hesitant about doing criminal acts like thieving and the like at this point in time. The men who were using him had made him take part in crimes several times. Thinking about that, the feeling that his hands were already dirty was welling

up, and guilt was descending upon him.

*So it's already too late for me*

Rio put on a self-depreciating smile on his mouth. He frowned and stared still at his hands.

“Oi, you there...are you a girl? ”

All of a sudden someone addressed Rio. It was the dignified voice of a woman. When he reacted to the voice and lifted his face, four people with varying ages were standing there. Each of them were wearing nice robes. Because their faces and bodies were hidden from view, Rio didn't know their gender except for the person who called out to him.

From their body build, the woman who addressed him seemed to be the oldest from among these people. From her youthful tone, her age shouldn't be less than twenty.

Behind the woman, there was a person with a small build whose age, assuming from their height, was around the middle of their teenage years, and two small children who obviously seemed to be around the same age as Rio.

It seemed the woman who addressed Rio was unable to differentiate his gender. In the first place, Rio had an androgynous look, but because his hair was unkempt and stretched long right now, it wasn't really strange that the woman mistook his gender.

“Smelly...”

One of the small children murmured in displeasure.

From the tone of the voice, she must be a girl. Her voice was cute and lovely, but the content of her statement was stinging. She didn't mince matters at all.

“It will be better not to smell the scent too much. It will be bad for your health.”



The other small child said that. This one seemed to be a girl also.

*They are just saying whatever they like...*

Rio received a shock that wasn't small, and his face was going to grimace reflexively. Certainly, he was aware of it himself, but he had just washed.

Rio turned his gaze toward the two girls. They were covering their faces with their robes' hood, but he sensed from them the type of gaze that was looking down on him without reservation.

On the other hand, he somehow understood that the petite person beside the girls was also observing Rio intently from under the hood. Although, it seemed this person wasn't really harboring ill will toward him.

“Oi, are you listening? Could it be that you are unable to even understand speech? ”

The older woman questioned with a grim voice. For some reason, she seemed to be impatient and seething with anger.

“I'm listening, what is it? ”

Rio replied with a cold voice. His eyes were observing the four people warily.

Their outfit was too beautiful for people who were living in the slums. From between the gap in the robe that the eldest woman, who was calling out to him, wore was the pommel of a sword that looked expensive.

He wondered just what business they had with an orphan from the slums. It was unthinkable that they would be trying to rob him, but Rio heightened his awareness a bit more.

“Did you happen to see a girl with light purple hair? Her age is about the same as yours.”

The female threw a question to Rio. She was a bit highhanded

while looking down on him. Her tone sounded like a command, as though it was only natural for the other party to answer her. It seemed these people were looking for someone.

It wasn't like Rio was irritated at the woman's attitude, but he also didn't think he should give her an answer politely. He didn't have any idea about the person who this woman was talking about in the first place.

Rio slowly stood up and glanced at the four with annoyance, then he walked away with a sigh.

“Oi, wait. Answer my question.”

Vanessa clicked her tongue and called to Rio to stop.

“Who knows, I don't know the person you are talking about.”

Rio stopped and answered carelessly with only half his body turning back.

“Answer honestly.”

“It won't end well for you if you are hiding something.”

However, the two girls behind the woman seemed to doubt Rio's statement. They were talking with an overbearing tone. Rio spontaneously felt indignant.

“That's why--”

“Everyone, I think we won't get an answer if we are asking in that way.”

When Rio was going to answer once more that he didn't know, the petite girl who had been staying quiet all this time interrupted with a slightly exasperated voice. From her tone, she must be a girl too.

“Hmph, Celia.”

The eldest female looked at the girl who was called Celia.

“Please leave this to me, Lady Vanessa.”

“I, guess. You are an active duty teacher, so you must be qualified in this.”

The woman who was called Vanessa seemed to hesitate slightly, but she immediately handed over the rein to Celia. Celia took a step forward.

“Say, you. I’m sorry that we surprised you. What is your name I wonder? Ah, my name is Celia.”

“...Rio.”

When Celia asked gently, Rio answered with a whisper.

“Rio? That’s an unusual name.”

“...I’m an immigrant’s child.”

“I see. That’s why your hair is the color black. By the way, Rio. I have something I want to ask you, will you give me an answer? ”

“That’s fine.”

Rio nodded.

“Did you see a girl with light purple hair? We are looking for her, do you know anything? ”

“Who knows, I didn’t see anyone like that but...”

Rio shook his head.



‘It’s already too late for her’--Rio didn’t add those words.

It was unthinkable that a child living outside the slums who would get lost inside the slums would end up safe. After all, even clothes that were being worn by a commoner could be sold for a price that couldn’t be made fun of by the residences of the slums.

If the aforementioned girl was the acquaintance of these four, then surely she was wearing fine clothes. She most likely already had all her possessions deprived from her a long time ago. If she was lucky then it would end there, but if not, after that she might get sold to a brothel where guys who liked little girls gathered.

“I see...”

The tone of Celia’s voice lowered in dejection.

“Ahead of here is the slums right? ”

But she took a breath to pull herself together and asked that.

“That’s right.”

“Is it big inside? We are thinking of entering for a bit, but will we get lost? ”

“It’s quite big and complicated inside but..., you all are going to enter there? ”

Rio’s eyes opened slightly wide.

“Yes, we have to go searching for that girl.”

Celia confirmed without hesitation.

“It’s better if you don’t go in.”

“Why? ”

Rio looked over the whole body of Celia who was tilting her head in puzzlement.

“...Your outfit is too beautiful, it’s like you are asking to be attacked inside there. It’s still morning so there are only a few people outside, but even so there are still people walking about. It’s not a place for a woman like you to enter.”

When Rio politely taught that, Celia’s eyes opened wide in slight surprise.

One of the girls behind her muttered

“His wording is quite something for an orphan, isn’t it? ”

“Aah, I see. As I thought, the public order there is really that bad.”

Celia said that and smiled wryly while looking at her appearance. She talked to herself “Even though this is just a plain robe”.

If, for example, Rio hadn’t received Haruto’s memory, then he surely wouldn’t have thought to teach Celia this useful information at this time. Especially if the other party was the highhanded Vanessa and the two girls before him, he absolutely wouldn’t have warned them.

They could enter the slums as they pleased and just die a dog’s death there. He would think that from the bottom of his heart.

But the human called Haruto inside Rio was softhearted.

At the very least he would stop a girl like Celia, who was interacting with him with the minimum courtesy required, from entering the slum.

“Err, what kind of clothes would a girl living in the slums wear? ”

“What kind of clothes? The same clothes that a commoner would wear but ones that are worn out. There are also adults who are wearing nice clothes, but that’s because those kind of people are those who are doing whatever they please inside the slums.”

“I see now. That’s useful as a reference.”

Celia nodded cutely in understanding.

“By the way, your speech is strangely polite for an orphan. Is that way of speaking normal for orphans? ”

“...I wonder. My departed mother was the one who taught me this way of talking.”

Rio answered with a slightly stiff voice.

Rio who was still seven years old didn't have much in the way of vocabulary, but he would be beaten up by the men if they heard him talking disrespectfully. Until now, Rio was always talking while observing the mood of the person from their countenance.

Since the beginning, the way his mother talked was also courteous, and perhaps because of the melding of Haruto's personality he displayed a large growth mentally; so his current way of talking was altered into something sounding really grown-up.

“So, sorry. I asked something strange.”

Celia apologized in a hurry.

“No, it's fine...”

Rio responded with a voice that wasn't really filled with emotion.

“...-”

Perhaps Celia could see a glimpse of unfamiliar emotion deep inside Rio's eyes because her eyes snapped open slightly wide.

“Celia, let's go back to change our clothes for now before returning here.”

Vanessa who was listening while staying quiet cut into the talk.

“What are you saying!? If we don't hurry that girl would-! ”

“That's right! ”

The two little girls proclaimed with anxious voice.

“If our information is correct, we should still have some leeway. Besides, we are taking action informally. We mustn’t move carelessly and get in the way of the formal searching team. Lady Christina too must not wish for the situation to turn into a ruckus correct? ”

“...Then let’s go back quickly and buy some clothes.”

Vanessa’s explanation caused the girl who was called Christina to frown in dissatisfaction.

“Celia, is there any suspicious magical power reaction nearby? ”

“Err, please wait for a bit. Area Search(Wide Range Search Magic).”

Celia took a deep breath and then spoke words that were unfamiliar to Rio. Then a geometrical circle, which was tinged with light, surfaced below Celia’s feet.

*Hm?*

Right after that, Rio felt a strange discomfort. He felt something like an unknown pulse wave. Besides, other than the surfacing geometrical circle, he could also see a faint light being emitted from Celia’s body.

*Hallucination?*

Thinking that Rio tried to focus his eyes.

“Eh, you...”

Celia stared hard at Rio’s face.

“What about this kid? ”

Vanessa asked.

“The Area Search showed reaction. I used magic that would react



to magic power that surpassed a certain amount. It looks like quite a bit of magic power is overflowing from this kid's body. He has the quality to use magic."

"Aah, I see.... So there is also that kind of person among the orphans."

"This guy has magic power? "

Vanessa showed an understanding reaction in contrast to Christina who was tilting her head doubtfully.

"There are people who have some magic power in the amount that can be used to do magic even if they aren't noble. There are also people who, even though their parents didn't have that much magic power, they themselves will have a lot of magic power because of atavism. Well, if they don't receive training they won't even be able to detect magic power, so those who don't notice won't notice it for their whole life."

Celia gave a simple explanation.

"Hee...so he isn't like what his appearance suggests then."

The girl who Rio still didn't know the name of muttered in admiration.

"Hmm, I see. Although, he is just an orphan in the end, so I don't think he will amount to much."

Vanessa turned her gaze at Rio as though to confirm something.

*Magic? Magic power? The strange wave of light just now was magic power? I certainly felt something just now. But she said it cannot be detected without receiving training.... What does this mean?*

Rio was listening to the conversation of the three without any understanding.

"Other than that, was there any reaction for suspicious magic

power? ”

“Oops, there isn’t anything like that in the radius of 50 meters around here. The magic power reaction that I got is only from us and this kid.”

“I see.... Our bad to make you go along with us, but thanks to you it looks like the investigation will go smoothly. User of Area Search is rare. On top of that there is no magician who boasts a search range as much as you.”

And so the two of them were making talk that was not really comprehensible for Rio like before, but Celia turned her gaze to Rio after their talk came to a pause.

“Thank you. This is the payment for the information, will you accept? ”

Saying that, Celia handed five pieces of large silver coins to Rio.

Rio’s eyes spontaneously turned wide after receiving the coins. Five large silver coins were obviously too much for the amount of information Rio told them just now. He wondered that perhaps this girl’s sense of money was strange.

Thinking that, Rio stared at Celia.

“Err, it’s not enough? ”

Then such a reply came back.

“...No.”

After a bit of pause, Rio shook his head slightly. He would receive any money given to him. Right now Rio had no leeway. He didn’t have any intention to give lip service and return the money.

“Thank you very much.”

Rio immediately nodded.

Most likely these four were noble. Curiosity would kill the cat. He shouldn't carelessly get involved with a noble, and they were also giving off the smell of trouble. So Rio didn't have any intention to stick his neck into this matter.

"Err..., thank you again for telling us courteously."

Celia spoke her thanks awkwardly.

"...No, it is I who should say thanks."

"Right, then, do your best."

Perhaps Celia's emotion was considerably stirred up from interacting with an orphan like Rio. Under her hood, Celia was making a conflicted expression that looked regretful.

"Then let's go, Celia."

"Yes."

The four turned around and left the entrance of the slums.

For some reason, Rio was staring at their figures from the back. When he focused his eyes hard, somehow he noticed a faint amount of light overflowing from their bodies.

He gasped, and then he tried focusing hard on his body. As expected, he could see a faint light like Celia and the others overflowing from him. It wasn't an illusion or anything. He certainly could see and detect it.

Like how blood was filling his whole body, this light was also filling his entire body. Like water that was welling out from a spring, a faint light was infinitely overflowing from Rio's body.

Among those four, the amount of light coming out in order from the greatest amount was from Celia, then Christina, Vanessa, and the girl who seemed to be Christina's follower.

But the amount of light overflowing from Rio's body was so much

that it was incomparable with those four.

He wondered that since this light was emitted from his body did Celia and others notice--? Despite continually thinking about these things he couldn't figure out the answer.

*Can other people see this? Will it be bad if it's noticed?*

In a panic, he tried decreasing the light overflowing from his body by concentrating. Unexpectedly, he was able to pull it in easily. There was still a trace amount overflowing, but if it was only this much, then it was far less than Celia and the others. He judged that there would be no problem like this and he sighed in relieve.

*So this light...is magic power?*

If it really was magic power, then he intuitively felt like he could do something with it.

When he started thinking about the risk of him trying out something without any knowledge whatsoever only to cause something irreparable, he thought it would be necessary to choose the time and place before experimenting.

Right now it would be bad if he was too late in getting back, so, for now, Rio headed back to the small hut.

Along the way back to the hut, Rio was wracking his brain regarding his life from here on.

If it was just the five large silver coins that he received from Celia, then even the current Rio wouldn't be troubled about his living cost for now. Although with how he had no prospect for a regular income, he couldn't just leave the men right now. Rio had no place to escape to as long as he was staying in the slums. If they found him while he was escaping, then he would provoke their anger, and he might get beaten to death.

For the time being, he had obtained warm food, and his wallet was

also filled. He felt like his physical condition, and his mood was turning better somewhat. Now that he had gotten a bit of a leeway he wanted time to thoroughly ponder leaving the men, also to consider how to live after that, his escape route, and so on.

While thinking about those things, he finally arrived at the dirty hut. His mood spontaneously turned gloomy, and he made a small sigh.

“I’m back.”

He gave a small greeting and entered the hut.

There were also times when he was unreasonable yelled at according to the men’s mood, but today it seemed they were in a good mood. They were also drinking alcohol with the accompaniment of the favored Gigi, so surely they wouldn’t act like that. Perhaps even now they were making merry loudly. That was what he thought.

*The lighting was off?*

Inside, the hut was pitch dark and silent. The window wasn’t open, and there was also no light illuminating the inside of the room. The visibility was bad.

A smell of rusted iron pierced his nose. Rio grimaced.

*What’s this smell? Blood?*

The smell of blood surfaced at the back of Rio’s mind. It was that same smell that came when he was injured.

“Nn! Nnnnnn! ”

Then, a muffled voice came from inside the hut. The source of the voice came from the corner of the room.

“...-!”

The sudden voice caused Rio’s body to jerk in surprise.

*What?*

The rustling sound of rubbing fabric could be heard. He wondered if someone was sleeping.

Rio hesitantly started walking toward the voice. It was at that moment..

\*Slick\*, the barefooted Rio stepped on a strange liquid. It seemed the floor was wet. Rio harbored the question toward the unknown and eerie sensation and opened the window.

*The window...*

Relying on the structure of the hut inside his head, he endured the unpleasant feeling at the bottom of his feet while advancing to the direction of the window. Rio threw open the only wooden window inside the room.

Then, the outside light shined in, and the inside of the room was starting to get faintly illuminated.

“Wha-...”

The disastrous state unfolding inside the room caused Rio to lose his words.

There were corpses scattered around.

The owners of the room, the men, who were having a drinking bout inside until just now, and--

“Gigi...san”

The corpse of the prostitute Gigi. The woman who gave Rio money to eat before this was dying with a lot of blood flowing out from her torso. Her provocative dress was dyed bright red while her body was lying down face up.

“Uu-...”

Rio spontaneously wanted to vomit. He pressed his mouth and somehow endured it.

“Nn! N, nnnn! ”

The muffled voice was still resounding inside the room.

Rio grimaced in discomfort while turning his gaze over in that direction. The bag was still in the corner of the room. Most likely some living thing was inside it.

*A person...? Don't tell me--*

From the bag's size, it didn't seem like an adult could be put inside only a child could fit inside that.

Rio felt a terribly bad premonition. The fast beating of his heart wouldn't stop. His body was trembling, and he held his breath. He fearfully approached the bag. The contents of the bag were squirming as though to proclaim itself.

Rio hesitantly untied the string, and the mouth of the bag was liberated with a rustling sound.

In the end, what was there was a cute girl wearing a beautiful dress that resembled a priestess's uniform. The girl that was around the same age as Rio, with light purple hair and purple pupils, was looking up with a vacant look.

*Aa, as I thought.*

At that moment, Rio felt something that resembled despair. An alarm bell was continuously ringing inside his brain.

But there was no way he could stay still like that forever.

He was driven by the impulse of wanting to escape right away from this place, but when he looked at the sacred girl before him, he strangely felt hesitant.

“...Are you alright? ”

When Rio reluctantly asked, the girl nodded. She was staring at Rio with a scared gaze, but thanks to him being close to her age, she wasn't really that wary of him.

It seemed that thanks to her being tied up inside the bag, and laid down on the floor, she still hadn't noticed the disastrous scene inside the room, which was fortunate. She might fall into a panic if she noticed. Well, she surely would notice right after this though.

"I'll untie the gag and rope now. Wait a second."

Saying that, Rio first took off the gag.

"Puhaa...haa"

The girl breathed roughly trying to suck in the fresh air. It seemed she was considerably weakened, her face looked somewhat feverish.

"Whe, where? This place..., where...is it? "

The girl asked while her body was trembling fiercely. Perhaps because the girl was scared of the gloomy interior of the room, perhaps she was feeling cold, or perhaps because of both.

"The slums. This is the house of the guys who were working me hard..."

Rio answered while quickly untying the rope binding the girl's body.

"Slu, slums? Wh, why? I..."

The girl asked her question with an absentminded look.

"Who knows? The rope is off. You can stand now."

Rio said after completely untying the rope.

"Ye, yes. Thank you ver...a, au"

The girl tried to stand while saying her thanks, but it seemed her



waist had no strength, or perhaps she had no stamina left, because she couldn't stand up well. When she tried to lift her upper body, her body slumped down.

“Are you alright? ”

Rio supported the body of the girl who just lost balance and gently laid her down.

“Ye, yes.”

Although she gave an affirmation, the girl's breathing was rough and her body was feverish.

“I see...”

Rio's voice was somewhat heavy. He stared still at the girl's face in observation.

*This girl, isn't she the girl who is being searched by that person called Celia just now?*

Yes. The girl who was being searched for by the group of four that Rio encountered at the entrance of the slum could be this girl, he thought. Her light purple hair, her beautiful dress that felt like something a noble would wear, seeing those he could only think of that possibility.

“E, err...”

The girl called to Rio. It seemed that just talking was the best she could do. Because she was inside the bag all this time, she might even have developed some slight dehydration.

“Pardon me. Can you...take me, to the castle? ”

The girl pleaded while breathing roughly.

“The castle? ”

“Please...I'm asking you. I'll ask my father, to give...thanks, that's

why”

“Father you say...”

Rio unconsciously spoke awkwardly. He got the feeling that this would surely become a trouble.

“Also, water...”

As expected her throat was dry. The girl wanted water.

“Stay lying down like that and wait for a bit. Don’t move from there.”

Saying that, Rio moved his feet toward the barrel that was filled with boiled water that had been cooled.

His nose had already been paralyzed, so it didn’t work anymore, but just by seeing the disastrous scene that inevitably entered his sight, he made an expression of being unable to stay here.

Contrary to the nausea and disgust that were attacking him unceasingly, his thoughts were strangely cold. He was thinking vacantly of just what he was doing here.

He filled the cup that he usually used with water, and then he quickly returned to the girl who was lying down limply.

“Here, it’s water. Don’t drink too quickly.”

Rio lifted up the girl’s upper body with his arm to make it easier for her to drink while presenting the cup toward her. If she was actually dehydrated, then it would be best to provide her with water that contained salt or sugar; but there was no way such fine drinking water existed in this hut.

The girl drank the simple water thirstily.

“Puhaa, haa.... Cough cough-”

“Calm down. It will be bad for your body if you drink so quickly.”

Rio warned when the girl choked.

“Ye, yes...”

She hazily replied. It seemed she was feeling relieved after supplying her body with water because her body relaxed.

“O, oi! ”

Rio called out to her in a hurry, but the girl stayed unmoving.

“She...fainted? ”

Judging so, Rio closed his eyes and repressed his feeling that strongly wanted to sigh. He gently laid down the girl.

All of a sudden, perhaps because it was an old room, a creaking sound from the wooden floor resounded clearly inside the silent room.

Rio jerked and turned around. There, a masked man was approaching--.

The masked man stabbed his knife toward Rio's torso.

He would be killed. Sensing that instantly, Rio felt a terror that felt like it would stop his heart.

But he moved his hands reflexively and deftly parried the man's hand that was holding a knife.

The man's knife stabbed inaccurately into the empty air.

“Wha-...”

A shocked voice slipped out from under the mask that was covering the man's face.

Rio was also staring at his hands in amazement when he noticed that his body had reacted in desperation. His body was instinctually

reproducing the movement that Haruto cultivated in his previous life.

Right now wasn't the time to have his focus distracted unnecessarily like that.

*This guy, he was hiding all this time? Why is he trying to kill me?*

Being that this was the first real fight that he was in, which suddenly appeared out of nowhere, Rio almost fell into a panic.

It was only natural. Whether in the previous life or this life, he had no experience facing an opponent who was pointing something sharp at him with the intent to kill.

His body felt hot, and it felt like the beating of his heart was reverberating throughout his whole body. Even though he hadn't moved much, he was running out of breath. Scary. It felt like his feet would tremble just from standing.

Rio took a stance with trembling hands and slowly backed away.

The masked man was putting up his guard because his attack had been splendidly dealt with. He was facing Rio with a focused stare and knife at the ready.

Honestly, Rio was simply lucky with the first attack. The man didn't seem to be an amateur, and Rio was just a kid, so if the man fought seriously and approached him, he would have no way to win with their difference in body size even if he tried to fight.

The man was slowly closing the distance.

Even if he fought like this he would definitely be killed--that was what Rio thought. But if he tried to run, there was no way he could escape with their difference in body size and stamina. Like this, he was blocked from every direction. Then,

*Haruto*

Inside Rio's brain, an unfamiliar voice of a girl resounded. The voice sounded somewhat cold, but it was a pretty voice that sounded

transparent. But the tone sounded strangely exhausted. And then, in the next moment--,

“Tsu...? ”

Rio's eyes opened wide. Suddenly, it felt like an extremely beautiful girl with faint pink hair appeared before his eyes. But it happened only in an instant. The girl immediately disappeared from his sight.

*Was it auditory hallucination, furthermore, visual hallucination too?) --Rio immediately moved his gaze to look at his surroundings, but he was unable to find the girl's figure. No, in the first place didn't that girl call him Haruto? Even though it was a name that no one in this world should know--.*

Like that, without understanding what just happened, Rio was falling into a light confusion.

*Right now there is no time. The way to use od--magic power...I'll teach you, so feel it, learn it.*

The voice of the girl, who seemed to be the same person as the illusion girl, resounded inside Rio's brain one more time.

*As I thought I didn't mishear!*

Rio thought that but,

“Wha, what do you mean the way to use magic power? ”

He yelled in respond to the mysterious voice while feeling like he was grasping at straws. The body of the man before him twitched, but right now he had no leeway to care about that.

*Sharpen your senses. From your body light is...coming out right? Use that light and your physical ability, and the toughness of your flesh...will become strong. Form that imagination. It's fine. Haruto...can do it.*

The intermittent voice of the girl inside his brain rang out. The explanation wasn't really clear, however, in the next moment, Rio's whole body felt like it was enveloped in a surging heat.

*With this...you can make movements that surpass the limit of your flesh. Do you remember...the sensation? Maintain this...sorry, I'm already--*

Then the girl's voice cut off.

Rio felt surprised at the change occurring in his body. The light overflowing from inside his body suddenly increased, and in the next moment, his body immediately turned light.

His senses became sharp. Not just his sight and hearing, it felt like he even awakened his sixth sense, like he was even able to sense something that originally he couldn't even feel.

It seemed that it was just like what the voice of the mysterious girl had said. By using the faint light that was overflowing from his body his physical ability and his body were both being strengthened. He was incredulous. He didn't understand the mechanism of this in the slightest, but the only thing he realized was that the girl supported him and made this possible.

Thanks to that he learned the trick. If it was now, it wasn't that difficult to maintain this state, and he got the feeling that the next time he would be able to strengthen his physical ability and his body by himself.

The true identity of the mysterious girl, this light, there were a lot of things he still didn't understand, but right now his priority was to deal with the killer in front of him.

At this point, only ten-odd seconds had passed since Rio parried the man's knife.

The man was slowly closing the distance toward Rio who was gradually backing away, but because Rio had suddenly stopped still, the man also stopped moving and observed the situation dubiously.

Rio raised his fighting spirit and gazed intently at the masked man.

And then, the man murmured a few words that sounded like a spell.

“Enchant Physical Ability(Physical Ability Strengthening)”

The man’s body was tinged in light, and then he was enveloped by a geometrical circle for just a moment.

Rio’s eyes opened wide slightly because when the circle vanished, the faint light that was dimly leaking out from the man’s body until now increased in brightness all of a sudden. Even so, it was still far less bright than the amount of light leaking out from Rio’s body, but Rio looked at the man warily.

The assassin then quickly approached Rio with unbelievable speed and stabbed using his knife with a speed that no ordinary person would be able to react against no matter what. He intended to decide the battle instantly.

But for Rio, the man’s movement looked so slow that he was able to deal with it leisurely. Both his dynamic vision and reaction speed were improving. Rio was shocked when he experienced it.

Rio shifted one side of his body to the side which caused the fastest thrust that the man unleashed to pierce the empty air. Rio, whose reach was inferior, stepped forward and landed a palm strike on the man’s stomach.

“Gua, hha? ”

The fierce impact the man felt from his stomach caused a scream to slip out from his mouth. The man’s body that was easily more than 80 kilograms was lightly blown away. Rio’s attack contained a power that was unthinkable to be coming from a kid.

Although the man managed to land, only barely, it seemed that his consciousness was almost completely wrested away from him. His understanding couldn’t catch up with what had just transpired. He was on his knee while staring at Rio’s face in bewilderment. Even so,

he stood up desperately and walked toward Rio slowly. The man stabbed with a sluggish movement, but Rio grasped the man's wrist and twisted it to hurt his joint.

“Gaah.”

Feeling pain from his wrist, the man reflexively let go of the knife.

Without stopping Rio broke the balance of the man and lightly threw him to the ground.

As he thought, his physical ability had increased. Besides, Rio's body should be put under a burden that couldn't be endured by the weak body of a kid, but just as the girl had told him beforehand, the toughness of his body was also increasing. His body wasn't feeling any burden.

“Guh, shit...a brat..., bastard.... What the hell, are you? ”

Because the man reflexively took a falling posture to soften the impact, he didn't lose consciousness. He rolled on the ground and grumbled resentment toward Rio with a groan.





“Haa, haa...”

Rio stood still while breathing hard. The beating of his heart wouldn't settle down. He was looking down at his trembling hands with astonishment.

After a while, Rio sent his gaze toward the man who was glaring up at him inside the gloomy room. He could catch a glimpse of a gaze that was filled with hatred from the gap of the mask.

The man seemed to think of something and tried to stand up once more while his body was staggering shakily.

*He is still going to fight!?*

Rio's face warped in distress.

The man should be injured all over already. He should have no more willpower remaining that would allow him to stand up.

And yet, why was he trying to stand up? --There was one answer. This man must be planning to kill Rio till the bitter end. Rio didn't understand what was driving this man to go that far.

He didn't even want to understand, but if the man was trying to kill him, then he--.

He took a breath in irritation and pushed the man down against the floor.

“Guh...”

A pained voice leaked out from the man's mouth.

Rio got on the man's back, and he stretched his hands out to catch the man's neck. He would be able to strangle the man to death if he put more strength to it.

But the shaking of his hands wouldn't stop. When he tried to put more strength, his hands trembled fiercely.

He was unable to kill. He couldn't kill. Even though the opponent was trying to kill him, Rio had no resolve to kill this man. Rio hesitated for a few moments and then, "Shit-!"

Yelling that, he threw the man's head on the ground as hard as he could. The man, who was trying to resist feebly, slumped and stopped moving.

He fainted. After confirming that, Rio stood up.

"I, I have to escape--."

He whispered in a daze. And then with unsteady steps, he started walking.

Rio nervously ran his gaze around him with wariness. He didn't know how to explain the situation if someone caught sight of this. It couldn't be helped that he was scared.

Then the figure of the girl who was still unconscious entered Rio's sight--.

It was still morning.

For the people who had a proper occupation, they would have started working since a long time ago; but there was almost nobody in the slums who had a proper occupation, so the surroundings were still deserted.

Rio was shouldering the unfamiliar girl who lost consciousness while dragging his feet as he walked through the slums. Because the girl's dress was standoutish, he hid her by covering her body with the bag she was put inside of in the beginning. Even though he wasn't wounded or anything, his feet were heavy.

How did it turn out like this? Why did he have to have this kind of experience? Such thoughts certainly existed in his mind, but he had no leeway to feel anger toward the unreasonable reality. He didn't even know where he should be going and only walked randomly.

Rio simply continued to walk intently until he realized he had already arrived at the entrance of the slum.

“Ah, you! Wait! ”

A young girl yelled at Rio from nearby.

Rio didn't notice that he was being called and continued to walk absentmindedly.

“I'm telling you to wait! ”

After those words, Rio felt a sensation of being forcefully pulled from behind. Someone was trying to take away the girl who Rio was shouldering.

“Chri, Lady Christina! Please wait! ”

“Vanessa, quickly take Flora! ”

“Ye, yes! ”

The person who was calling him--one of the four whom Rio encountered near the slum's entrance--was Christina. The other three were also together with her.

Completely different from before, they were hiding their figure using really shabby robes with hoods attached, but there was no doubt they were the same people from before considering the name that entered Rio's ear and their height combination.

Christina was pulling the girl called Flora from Rio's shoulder with an angry look.

“Oi, you, let go of Lady Flora.”

Hearing the cold voice from Vanessa, the strength in Rio's hands that were shouldering Flora relaxed.

Then, Flora was taken away from Rio's shoulder by Vanessa's hand.

“Flora! Flora! ”

Christina desperately yelled the name of Flora who was being held by Vanessa’s arms.

“Please calm down. She is only unconscious. Celia, Roana. Please take care of Lady Flora.”

Vanessa calmly ascertained Flora’s condition, and then she entrusted her to be looked after by the other two.

“Ye, yes! ”

“Understood! ”

The girls who were called Celia and Roana nodded and Celia held Flora. Rio was staring at that happening apathetically as though it was other people’s business.

“Oi, you! ”

Vanessa yelled and glared at Rio.

She drew out her sword with a smooth motion and thrust the tip on Rio’s neck.

But Rio didn’t look perturbed. That was because he didn’t feel any killing intent from Vanessa at all, unlike the man who was trying to kill him before.

Although, if he was asked whether he was evaluating the situation with a calm thought, that wasn’t the case. If he had to say which, it would be better to say that his concern about the event was faint.

“You, talk about what happened.”

Vanessa commanded with a cold voice.

Rio tried to turn around slowly as though to state that it didn’t concern him, but, “Wait! ”

Saying that Christina circled in front of Rio.

“It’s dangerous! ”

Vanessa was taken by surprise and yelled.

But in the next moment, Christina ignored Vanessa’s warning and slapped Rio’s cheek. \*Pan\*, a dry sound echoed in the surroundings.

Rio was there in body but not in spirit, but he came back to his senses from the hit.

“...Eh? ”

A questioning voice leaked out from Rio’s mouth.

He couldn’t understand. Why was Christina, who was in front of him, angry? Why was he slapped after helping the girl they were looking for?

Only the pain on his cheek was spreading bit by bit within his confusion.

“Don’t stay silent and answer! You were lying, weren’t you? What did you plan to do with Flora? ”

Christina was blaming Rio while concluding one-sidedly.

Rio really didn’t understand what she was saying. Rio felt something unknown welling up inside his throat.

“Ha? ”

Rio let out a penetratingly cold voice and gazed into Christina’s eyes.

“Tsu...”

Christina jerked, and her body trembled. She reflexively moved her hand to slap Rio’s cheek one more time.

However, Rio too reflexively moved his hand and caught her hand

first.

“Let me go! Dirty! Smelly! ”

Christina yelled, but Rio didn't let her hand go. Then, “Let go of that hand.”

Vanessa pointed her sword at Rio's neck once more, she spoke with a cold voice.

Rio sent a glare at Vanessa while slowly releasing the hand.

Sure enough, the released Christina slapped Rio's cheek with all her strength. Even though Rio caught that movement with his eyes, he didn't particularly do anything to defend himself.

“Hah.”

Rio scoffed mockingly.

Christina jerked and trembled once more seeing that smile.

She thought it was scary. Because for Christina who was raised as a princess, it was a type of emotion that was directed toward her for the first time.

“Lady Christina! Please stop doing anything provocative! ”

“It's his fault! What he is doing is lèse-majesté! ”

“This young boy doesn't know that your honorable personage is royalty. It's necessary to ask him the circumstance.”

“Then quickly restrain him! ”

When Christina angrily yelled that, Vanessa sighed with a troubled look.

“That's how it is. Boy...you said your name is Rio huh. I'll have you go with us until the castle.”

“No way.”

Rio rejected decisively.

“My bad but this is not a "request". It's an "order". You have no right to refuse.”

Saying that, Vanessa pointed the sword in her hand until it almost touched Rio's neck. If it moved just three more millimeters, that tip would pierce the neck's skin.

Rio stared into Vanessa's eyes without faltering.

Vanessa too stared back intently into Rio's eyes.

Christina, Celia, and Roana being the three outsiders felt the prickling atmosphere of the place and stared quietly at that situation. Silence flowed between the five for a while.

Amidst that,

*This boy, is he really a kid?*

Inside her heart, Vanessa was feeling astonishment in a sense toward Rio's courage.

It wouldn't be strange that a normal kid would have lost themselves to rage a long time ago and ranted loudly, or bawled while begging for their life. Not only was Rio behaving defiantly, but he calmly saw the line that mustn't be crossed even against Vanessa and others who should be in the overwhelmingly advantageous position.

Vanessa was feeling an unknown eeriness in her spine.

“I only saved that fainted girl there. You can just ask her when she wakes up.”

“No good. I'll have you speak what you know from your own mouth.”

Vanessa bluntly rejected Rio's suggestion.

Rio grumbled realizing that this would only cause the conversation



to develop into an unproductive one. Vanessa would only make use of her authority and strength to bring Rio to the castle forcefully. That was what Rio concluded.

It wasn't like he didn't have the option to counterattack and escape using that strength which he had learned just now, but his face had already seen, and he also didn't know whether he could win if they fought.

Besides, if he did something like that, Rio might completely become a criminal. The other party was nobles after all. Doing that would be a poor move that was just completely hasty and failed to consider the consequence. Rio strengthened his resolve.

“...It will only be talking correct? ”

“Yeah, if you are innocent, then you will be released. Nothing bad will be done to you. I'll also hear the story briefly from you while we are moving.”

Thus Rio, who was nothing but a mere orphan, traveled from the slums, which was at the lowest class of the royal capital, to the castle that was the center of the capital.

Around ten minutes after that, about the time that Rio had arrived at the castle, around the hut that became a crime scene, people who were dispatched from the castle for the search were advancing. Other than them, the residences of the slum also became noisy onlookers.

“Master Alfred! We found someone still breathing.”

A man wearing the knight uniform of the kingdom's royal guards came out of the door from the hut.

“Restrain him and bring him out. He might be a conspirator of the kidnapping.”

Alfred Aimard--his age was in the late twenties, and he was a man of style wearing a splendorous mantel above his knight uniform--was giving out instructions.

Meanwhile, someone was slipping in between the onlookers while observing that series of exchanges. Because a black robe covered the person's whole body, his appearance, age, and gender couldn't be perceived.

At that time, a restrained man was carried out from inside the hut. It was the person who had attacked Rio before this. His mask had been removed, and his bare face was exposed. The man appeared to have had regained consciousness, but it seemed that the damage from the battle remained. His face was warped in pain.

Seeing that, the person in the black robe murmured with a small voice.

"This is...it seems it shall become a slightly bad situation if left like this."

His must be male considering the quality of his voice. The expression that was hidden by the hood's darkness couldn't be seen, but in contrast to his words the man's tone didn't contain any anxiety or agitation at all.

"...It can't be helped."

The man made a small sigh while muttering that. He then took out a small stone that seemed similar to a jewel from his pocket. Without any hesitation his fingers crushed the stone that he was holding. Then, as if to correspond with the stone being crushed into pieces, the restrained and transported man looked to be in pain.

"Tsu...a...gahah"

His body jerked and then trembled, and after a moment he ceased breathing.

"O, oi! "

The knight who was lending his shoulder to the man raised his voice in panic.

"What's the matter? "

“He, he died.”

When Alfred who noticed the strangeness asked, the knight conveyed the fact that he ascertained from the man's body.

“What? ”

Alfred yelled in surprise and he raised his eyebrows high.

The black robed man slipping through the onlookers stared in satisfaction at that.

“This is the right time. I've accomplished my objective; I guess I'll return.”

Leaving those words behind, he retired from that place.

## Chapter 3

In the end, Rio was leniently confined in an interrogation room toward the lower level of the castle.

“Wait here for a bit. The investigator will arrive soon.”

After saying that, the soldier who guided Rio there exited the interrogation room and the sound of the door getting locked echoed inside the room.

Rio moved his gaze and quickly looked around inside the room.

It seemed there was no window in this interrogation room. There was only a wooden table and chair placed at the center of the room. The sight inside was truly dreary.

It was impossible to go outside except by opening the only door that was the entrance of the room. The lock was set so that it could only be unlocked from the outside, so once the door was locked, it was indeed an isolated room.

“Looks like I’m not trusted at all.”

Rio understood the situation he was placed in and murmured in irritation.

By the way, after Vanessa and others had entrusted Rio to the soldier who guided him here, they took Flora in a hurry and left.

Along the way here Rio had briefly explained what happened, but until Flora woke up and they confirmed the fact with her, they planned to confine Rio as an important witness.

During that time, it wouldn’t be a waste of time if they carried out a formal interrogation that would be left in the records. It was really

logical.

This was the natural treatment when thinking about each side's respective status and relationship, and he could understand why he was being confined like this. But honestly speaking, this really wasn't funny at all.

He wondered if it would have been better not to have saved Flora if, in the end, it became like this.

If he did that, then he wouldn't be receiving this kind of treatment around this time. Even though he didn't do anything bad, he was suspected and locked up like a criminal--.

This was the result of him being unable to abandon the fainted Flora and bringing her outside.

Unreasonableness made this world. It was created so that it was kind to the strong, and absurd toward the weak.

Even though he should have understood such a thing--.

Rio sighed to let out his irritation and sat down heavily on the shabby chair. The comfortableness of the chair couldn't be said to be pleasant even if he spoke in flattery. He folded his hands and closed his eyes in discontent. He wasn't given any information, and he couldn't see how his future would go, but even if he thought hard about it, the situation wouldn't turn out for the better.

Then the best thing he could do was to relax while waiting. When he calmed himself down, the sound of the door getting unlocked could be heard not before long. Next, the door was immediately opened.

Three men appeared from there. Each of them was wearing the knight uniform of the kingdom's royal guards, but the man who was standing in the lead was wearing a knight uniform that was specially designed with extravagance.

The man wearing the extravagant knight uniform looked like he was in his late twenties. He had well-ordered looks, but he seemed somewhat pretentious. Glimpses of scorn could be seen in his gaze

toward Rio.

The man with the extravagant knight uniform glanced at Rio once and then asked.

“I’ll be asking you several questions now. I am the vice-captain of the royal guards, Charles Arbeau, and I’ll be in charge of your interrogation. Answer honestly if you want to get this over with quickly.”

He suddenly commanded with an arrogant tone. Rio frowned in displeasure.

The knight who introduced himself as Charles Arbeau sat down in the chair on the opposite side of Rio.

“Were you the one who kidnapped her highness the second princess? ”

He asked that while looking at some kind of document. He completely disregarded Rio’s feeling.

The knight who had the role as secretary sat down beside Charles and began to write down the affidavit of the interrogation.

The remaining knight was standing right at the side as though to overwhelm Rio.

“...It wasn’t me.”

Rio answered brusquely due to his animosity toward the arrogant attitude of Charles and others.

“Then where did you discover her majesty the second princess? ”

“Inside a hut in the slums. She was tied up inside a bag.”

“Why were you there? ”

“Because it was the hut of the people who were raising me.”

“I heard a report that those guys were the culprit that imprisoned her majesty the second princess though? ”

“Looks like it. I saw when they came home, while carrying the bag, where the princess was put inside.”

And so like that the interrogation was progressing blandly. All of the questions were things that he had talked about with Vanessa and the others on the way here to the castle. Most likely the document Charles was holding was the summary from that information. He was interrogating Rio while searching whether there were any inconsistencies.

There was also information that might become disadvantage for Rio in the contents of the document, but any of them was possible to be cleared up if they investigated genuinely. Because it would be bad if he carelessly lied and his testimony lost consistency and objectivity of all the facts, Rio basically decided that he would answer honestly.

“In other words, you are saying that you are unrelated with the kidnapping of her highness the second princess? ”

“That’s right.”

Charles asked in suspicion. Rio affirmed without any hesitation.

“Hmph, how suspicious. According to the report, the thugs who were raising a useless orphan like you got slaughtered by an unknown man wearing a mask, but why are you alive then?”

“That man was defeated.”

“By whom? ”

“By me.”

When Rio answered, Charles snorted.

“Don’t lie. You are saying a brat like you defeated that bandit? Impossible. The opponent should be someone trained.”

“I don’t know about that. Perhaps that man was just careless? Besides, at the time I was just desperate, even I don’t really remember what I did...”

Rio hid the fact about the body strengthening.

“Hmph, well, doesn’t matter. Then, where is that man right now?”

“Who knows? If he didn’t wake up and escape, then he will be lying around together with the corpses inside the hut.”

Rio answered with a slightly fed up tone.

“Right about now that hut must be being investigated. The report should arrive here before long. If it’s just as you say then it seems we will be able to extract information from that man but...”

Right after Charles said that, the sound of the door of the room being knocked resounded.

“Looks like it has come. Oi.”

Charles urged one of the knights to open the door.

One more knight entered the room.

“Pardon me. Master Charles, I’ve come to report the investigation’s progress.”

The new knight said that and began to whisper something into Charles’s ear.

Charles gazed fixedly at Rio while listening to the talk quietly for a while. Rio too was observing the situation silently. Before long, Charles frowned in displeasure.

After he finished listening to the report,

“...It seems it’s necessary to change the location. Stand up.”

Charles commanded Rio.



“Why are we changing location? ”

“Obviously it’s for the interrogation.”

“Then isn’t it fine to do that here? ”

Rio looked confused at the unclear answer of Charles. He didn’t understand the meaning of leaving the interrogation room even though they were doing an interrogation.

“Never mind that, stand up! There is no time.”

Charles let out an overbearing voice. The other knights held Rio’s sides to forcefully make him stand up. Rio made a discontent expression.

“I’ll stand by myself.”

Saying that, he quickly stood up. Like that, he tried to casually shake off the hands of the knights holding his sides. But the knights didn’t seem to have any intention to let go of Rio. They continued to firmly hold Rio’s sides.

“I won’t try to escape, so can you let go of me? ”

Rio asked Charles who was sitting in front of him.

“Hmph, let’s see...”

Charles suddenly stood up and walked to in front of Rio and,

“Hold out both his hands.”

He commanded the knights restraining both of Rio’s arms.

“Understood.”

The knights quickly replied and forcefully pulled Rio’s arms.

“Oi, stop it! ”

Rio immediately resisted, but there was no way he could win

against adults with a child's strength.

He might be able to shake them off easily if he increased his body's strength along with his physical ability like the battle before, but he was unable to react calmly to the sudden development.

Besides, if he shook off Charles and the knights here, he might get treated as a criminal for real due to him obstructing the knight's duty. If that was the case, even if Rio was calm, the possibility was low that he would strengthen his body and attempt an escape.

Rio was struggling, but the adult's physical strength easily held him in place. Seeing that, Charles quickly moved his hands.

Then, a clicking sound resounded inside the room.

“Hah? ”

Rio stared at his wrists with a dumbfounded look. A metallic shackle was put on his wrists, with a chain to pull on it extending with a clanking sound from it. A knight was holding the chain to prevent Rio from escaping.

“Let's hurry. Bring that brat along.”

Charles said that while Rio's mind was unable to catch up with the situation.

Rio was pulled along by the chain, and the place where Rio was taken to was a damp and humid basement.

Cold air that chilled the skin was drifting out from inside the room.

The lantern that was hung on the wall was dimly illuminating the place, but mysteriously the light source of the lantern wasn't from a fire. The interrogation room where Rio was staying before this also had several of the same things, but this room only had one of them set up, making the place dim.

There was a solid metal door at the entrance with a bed placed at the corner of the room, but livability and comfort were completely disregarded in this room. The floor, wall, and even the ceiling were all covered with stone.

In addition, several things that looked like binding tools were placed inside the room. Parts of the wall and floor had stains--most likely from human blood--which changed the surface color here and there.

The scene made Rio imagine what could be done inside this room even if he didn't want to. Most likely it was a solitary cell that was made for a rough interrogation. Rio concluded that and, "Oi, why do I have to be put in prison?"

He stated his dissatisfaction with a bit harsh way of talking without paying attention to his tone.

"That's because you are suspected in the kidnapping case of her highness the second princess. It's obvious that it's necessary to confine you for the interrogation."

"I didn't do anything like that!"

Rio objected with a voice that contained anger. He could still accept if he were told that he was an important witness, but he couldn't understand why he was being suspected.

"That's what all the suspects say."

Charles casually denied that with an illogical argument.

"Don't screw-, tsuu..."

When Rio was going to express his discontent, a knight strongly pulled at the chain extending from his shackle.

Rio's body lost its balance, and he lightly rolled on the ground.

Charles looked down on Rio and declared loudly.

“I judged that you might be heavily involved with the abduction of her highness the second princess. Therefore, I will interrogate you from now. You have no right to keep silent. Answer the question you are asked honestly. If you stay quiet then know that you will be met with a painful experience.”

“Don’t...screw around.”

Rio almost lost his words from bewilderment, even so he was unable to suppress his anger and glared at Charles with a strong rage.

“Hmph, you’ve got a rebellious gaze. Those are really the eyes of a criminal with low intelligence.”

Charles sighed with an exaggerated gesture. His attitude was ridiculing and sarcastic. It was unclear whether it was his real self or something he intentionally did to provoke Rio.

“Looks like I need to teach you about your position here first. Do it.”

Charles jerked his chin while giving instructions to the knights. A knight then pulled at the shackle’s chain, hung it on the pulley that was attached to the ceiling, adjusted the height, and began to hang up Rio.

“Oi, stop this! ”

Rio protested, but the hand of the knight didn’t stop working. His hands were hung up at a height where his feet were just barely touching the ground. It was a posture where his wrists were burdened with his whole body’s weight.

No matter how light his body as a child was, it was quite the burden that was put on Rio’s wrists.

When Rio grimaced from the pain, Charles suddenly slipped out a smile of satisfaction. Rio then noticed the man’s hand was holding a wooden stick.

“I too don’t really wish to do anything violent. If you cooperate

with the interrogation, then I'll immediately release you from your current state. First, confess that you are involved with the kidnapping of her highness the second princess. How about it? ”

Charles talked while patting Rio's cheek with the stick. Rio endured the pain in his wrists, “No way. I didn't do anything like that.”

By saying that he refused Charles's suggestion.

“No matter what? ”

Rio responded to Charles's question with silence.

The next moment, Charles strongly hit Rio's stomach with the stick.

“Gah, hah...”

A groan leaked out from Rio's mouth.

Charles gently rubbed Rio's stomach with the stick that he had just used to hit it with.

“You, bastard, were involved with the kidnapping of her highness the second princess. Isn't that right? ”

He questioned once more.

“...I, didn't, do anything.”

“Foolish.”

Charles said. He let out a sigh with a theatrical gesture. He brought his mouth closer to Rio's ear.

“You're going to regret that.”

He murmured with a cold voice.

On the other hand, around that time, in Flora's bedroom that was located at the upper floor of Bertram Kingdom's castle.

*"Zzz...zzz..."*

On an extravagantly large bed with a canopy attached, the second princess, Flora Bertram, was sleeping calmly. From the window of the balcony where the scenery of the royal capital Beltrant could be surveyed, the gentle wind of spring was blowing into the room.

Detection Magic

"Detection"

After Celia chanted a spell, a circle of light surfaced on her hand. Like that she closed her eyes and concentrated while holding her hand above Flora's body.

After a while, Celia opened her eyes and sighed quietly.

"There is no trace of magic being applied in the princess's body. Medical study is outside of my specialty so I cannot say anything about that, but I think she will recover immediately if she is supplied with enough water and rest."

After Celia reported the result of the examination, Vanessa sighed in relieve.

"Celia, my thanks. If your Detection didn't find anything abnormal, then surely there really is no sorcery applied to Lady Flora."

Saying that, Vanessa deeply bowed her head to Celia.

"No, I'm happy if I can be useful with my meager strength. With this we can feel relieved."

"Yes. Although, in the end we still don't know what the aim of the kidnapping was..."

"But I believe the information we obtained from that boy called Rio is really significant. Perhaps it's possible that the culprit will be discovered."

“...That’s only if what that young boy said is the truth though.”

“Are you saying that he is lying? ”

Celia asked with her eyes opened wide.

“No, of course there is also the possibility that is not the case, but it’s an occupational disease for me to be doubtful.”

“But I think that boy isn’t a bad kid.”

“If you who are a teacher in the royal academy say that then perhaps it’s not wrong.”

Saying that, Vanessa suddenly put a smile on her lips.

“I’m still a beginner teacher though.”

Celia responded bashfully, but then she seemed to notice something and opened her mouth.

“Come to think of it, where are Lady Christina and Roana? ”

“Aah, about this time they must be getting scolded by his majesty due to their misappropriation of authority and unauthorized outing.”

Just as Vanessa answered with an exasperated face, Flora showed signs of waking up.

“Uu...nn”

“Lady Flora! ”

Vanessa swiftly reacted and called out.

Flora opened her eyes faintly. She blinked repeatedly and stared at Vanessa’s face in a daze.

“Vanessa...is it? This place...”

“Here is Lady Flora’s bedroom. Your body is weak from light dehydration and you lost consciousness. Please accept this.”

Vanessa took a metallic jug and a glass that were put on the table, poured the drink into the glass, and offered it to Flora.

“Thank you.”

Flora said her thanks and accepted the cup. She slowly put the drink into her mouth. After a while, her mouth parted from the glass and she made a small sigh. She looked at Celia and opened her mouth.

“Err, you are? ”

“My name is Celia Clair, your highness. I’m serving as Lady Christina’s homeroom teacher in the royal academy.”

“You are Big Sister's.... I often hear rumors about you.”

“It’s my honor.”

Celia bowed with a respectful behavior. Flora smiled weakly to that.

“Can I ask for an explanation about what happened? What in the world happened to me...”

“Yes-. Allow me to explain.”

When Flora asked for an explanation about the situation, Vanessa began to explain.

She talked to Flora about the particulars of the event broadly for a few minutes.

“--And so, that young boy claimed that he was simply safeguarding Lady Flora, but is that the truth? ”

When Vanessa finished explaining, she asked that question.

“Yes. I was in a daze at that time, but it was true that I asked a child around the same age as me for help.”

Flora assented with a nod.



“Then is the name of that boy Rio? ”

“...I’m sorry. I don’t know, I didn’t ask his name.”

Flora’s face clouded and she shook her head.

“But I’ll know if I see his face. Where could that person be? I wish to say my thanks.”

Next, Flora said that.

“...Around this time he is likely being interrogated.”

“Interrogation, is it? Why? ”

Flora tilted her head and asked.

“There is a need to confirm whether the boy’s testimony is the truth or not.”

“Then please call him here. That person has saved me.”

Flora testified for Rio’s innocence and she told her demand.

However, Vanessa’s expression clouded with a troubled look.

“That’s..., as expected it will be difficult to bring him into this room...”

“Why? ”

“That boy is nothing but a mere orphan. It will be necessary to make his appearance suitable first, and his Majesty’s approval will be needed...”

“...Then please take care of the necessary procedure. I won’t allow any inconvenience for that person.”

Flora asked with a slightly stronger tone.

“Yes-, understood. Princess, please rest well. Don’t force yourself.”

“I understand. I’ll leave the matter in your care.”

“Of course. ...Celia. I’m sorry but can I ask you to keep the princess company? I will take care of the various procedures.”

“Yes, it will be my pleasure.”

“Thank you. I will return as soon as possible.”

Vanessa said her thanks to Celia who agreed cheerfully, then she headed to where Rio was with a hurried footsteps.

Rio was greatly exhausted.

The skin on his wrists was torn because the shackle was digging into it, but he already couldn’t feel the pain. Or rather, the pain from the beating on his whole body using the stick was far more terrible. The pain in his wrist couldn’t be compared.

“This shitty brat! Quickly spit out information about the kidnappers! ”

The angry yell of Charles resounded inside the solitary cell. His tone was mostly filled with anxiousness instead of anger.

Rio didn’t understand the reason, but he noticed it. His realization of the opponent’s impatience became the impetus that enabled him to recover most of his calmness right now.

Even so, the situation was terrible. Since coming into this room, Rio had been beaten the whole time. He was continued to be forced to confess about a thing that he wasn’t involved with. He wasn’t allowed to escape by losing consciousness.

He already had no stamina remaining. It was the best he could do to maintain his consciousness by using his stubbornness and bluffing.

He also tried to strengthen his flesh by doing body reinforcement to at least lessen the damage.

He vividly remembered the sensation at that time. If he was told to do it one more time, then he thought that he would be able to do it right away if he concentrated. But somehow Rio was unable to do body reinforcement.

The cause was the shackle that was restraining Rio. This shackle was filled with magic to seal the wearer's magic power. Rio didn't know anything about magic power and sorcery, but the body reinforcement that he performed in the battle before this was using magic power as an energy source. Because of this shackle, he became unable to emit magic power to the outside of his body. Due to that, he was unable to do the body reinforcement.

However, Rio didn't give up and continued to look for a chance. Charles was impatiently urging Rio to confess because there was a reason that made him anxious. If Rio confessed in such a situation, it wasn't hard to imagine that it would become a result that benefited Charles.

That was why Rio absolutely wouldn't yield against the violence and hardened his resolve to not make a false confession.

“I don't have nothing more to say than this.”

“You bastard-! ”

Charles swung the stick as though to say that he couldn't be patient anymore. It was a merciless attack.

“Gah.”

His face was hit. \*Trickle-\*, blood was starting to flow from Rio's nose and mouth.

“Vi, vice-captain! He will die if you overdo it.”

One of the knights that were silently observing the interrogation stopped Charles in panic.

“Shut up! My position will be in danger at this rate! ”

Charles replied angrily with a hysteric tone.

“Ho, however. If you kill him arbitrarily then your position will become even worse. Even now we are already crossing a dangerous bridge by doing this.”

“Then what are you telling me to do? This is a situation when we won’t be able to obtain any return if we are fearing the risk! If I don’t recover my honor here then all of you will fall along with me!”

After Charles yelled that, silence descended inside the room.

At present, everyone in this room belonged under the royal guards. All of them were people whose position was in danger due to the influence of Flora’s kidnapping case.

The commotion due to Flora getting kidnapped by someone’s work happened yesterday.

The royalty of the Beltram Kingdom was carrying out a prayer ceremony for the country’s prosperity that was a spring custom. Flora was given an important role as a priestess who would accomplish a vital part in that ceremony.

In the ceremony, it became a tradition to perform a preceding purification ceremony. Because of that, Flora visited a spring near the capital that had been designated as a sacred ground since the ancient time.

During the occasion of the purification ceremony, no one was allowed to enter the sacred ground other than the priestess and her assistants. That custom backfired. The royal guards were laying out a rigorous security system around the spring, but because the spring was inside a forest, a bandit was allowed to slip through the hole in the security.

The fact that Flora was kidnapped was the failure of the royal guards who were in charge of the security at that place.

The people who were the core of that security were the members who were in this place.

At present, Charles was at significant risk of losing his position as the royal guard's vice-captain. Fearing that, he was anxious for an achievement to recover his honor that had fallen to the ground.

Charles had forcefully taken the job of interrogating Rio from the person who received that duty from Vanessa. Then he forcibly carried out the interrogation in the hope of making it his achievement.

If it was necessary, he even took into consideration putting some false charges on Rio and distorting the truth--.

Everything was an act to lighten the punishment for him as much as possible.

In the justice system of Bertram Kingdom, the confession from the suspect was recognized as extremely strong proof. Because of that, if Rio confessed then his crime would become something definite.

If Rio was made to give a fabricated testimony that was convenient for Charles and his gang through interrogation, and then if he were also made to provide the same confession in front of the king who would give the verdict, then Rio's crime would be beyond any doubt.

Even if Flora woke up and gave a testimony that was advantageous for Rio, it would be impossible to overturn Rio's crime that had become set in stone. That was how strong the value of a confession as proof in this country.

Rio was a seven-year-old kid--, if he were threatened or beaten for a bit, then he would surely obey and make a convenient confession. Charles was making light of Rio like that in his mind.

However, because Rio was displaying unexpected guts and fortitude, his expectation was greatly derailed. Typically there was no time limit for interrogations, but it was only this time that such a time limit existed.

It was a match against time until Flora woke up. If Flora ascertained that Rio helping her was a fact, Rio would become Flora's benefactor. With his crime staying in an unsettled state, there would be a high possibility that it would become impossible to carry out the

rough interrogation.

If that happened, only the fact that Charles was forcefully carrying out an interrogation that was like torture and hurt a benefactor of royalty would remain.

Far from making the situation surrounding Charles's punishment better, it would worsen instead.

Therefore Charles was terribly impatient. It wouldn't be strange for Flora to wake up anytime. In that case, it was also only a problem of time for it to become noticed that he was carrying out an interrogation in this room.

Before that happened, he had to make Rio confess no matter what.

"...Bring the Collar of Servility here."

Charles spoke with a low and cold tone. The knights around him opened their eyes wide in shock.

"I, it will be a serious crime to use the Collar of Servility on a person who hasn't been determined to be a criminal without permission."

magic tool

The Collar of Servility was an artifact that would restrain the wearer's free will and make it easier to give them an order.

When someone who got that collar put on them received an order from the collar's registrant, the feeling of wanting to obey that order would well-up in them. If they tried to take action that ran counter to the order, or if the collar's registrant chanted a specific spell, an intense pain would run through the body.

Also, because there was the history of various malignant incidents happening using this artifact in the past, strict conditions were put in place to use it by the national law.

For example, the collar could only be used on a slave or criminal. When using it, there had to be a notification sent to the country.

There were those kinds of rules.

Charles, who was on the brink of losing his sanity, was going to commit a taboo.

“Shut up! Stop talking and quickly--”

Then, when Charles was yelling angrily, the door of the underground room was opened forcefully.

The knights inside the room jerked in surprise and turned around toward the door. The one who showed up from the opened room was the female knight who brought Rio to the castle, Vanessa Aimard.

“...Lord Arbeau, what is the meaning of this? ”

Vanessa confirmed the situation inside the room, frowned, and asked with a voice that was filled with anger.

Charles was at a loss for words only for a moment.

“...It’s a formal interrogation based on the authority of the royal guards’ vice-captain.”

He immediately used his quick wit and answered without any remorse.

“I should have entrusted the interrogation toward my own subordinate though? ”

Vanessa asked with a protesting tone.

“That person received a sudden task. I took over the task from him seeing that I’m not busy.”

“...Why is there a necessity for you, the royal guards’ vice-captain, to be personally carrying out the interrogation? ”

“Because the case this time is also my failure. I too am feeling a responsibility in my own way. Is there any problem? ”

Charles persisted in acting nonchalant to the end.

“I recall having spoken beforehand to carry out the interrogation gently because there is a chance that that young boy is a benefactor of Lady Flora though? ”

Vanessa turned her gaze to Rio who was being hanged up from his wrists and asked.

“Hmm, certainly I heard something like that. But I’m suspecting that there is a high chance that this brat is involved in the kidnapping of her majesty the princess.”

Charles talked with feigned ignorance.

“Are you saying that there is proof that hinted of the crime other than the testimony? ”

“I made that judgment from the circumstantial evidence. The possibility isn’t zero don’t you think so? ”

“...It’s just as you say, but we should wait until Lady Flora has woken up, isn’t that right? ”

“That’s the difference in our opinion. A rough interrogation cannot be done if he is a benefactor of her highness, right? In that case it will be a long path away for us to discover the truth.”

He had a comeback for every remark. What a man with a slippery tongue, Vanessa thought.

“...It seems he is really Lady Flora’s benefactor. Have you found out if he has any relation with the kidnapping incident? ”

“Fortunately, it seems he isn’t related. If it is heard later that the benefactor is actually a criminal, it will surely hurt the heart of her highness too. No, this is truly fortunate.”

Charles showed a delighted attitude with a strangely dramatic way of speaking.



For Vanessa, it wasn't like she didn't have any complaint, but even if she kept questioning him here, he would surely keep evading with the slipperiness akin to an eel.

She could only submit a written opinion to her superior later and ask for their judgment regarding this.

"Then I want you to end the interrogation of that boy here. If he is Lady Flora's benefactor, then he mustn't be treated rudely. Surely he will also meet with his majesty the king later."

"If that's the case; then I'll happily withdraw from here. Oi, unlock the shackle."

When Charles commanded, the knights hurriedly took off Rio's shackle. Because he already had no willpower remaining to even stand, he collapsed on the floor.

"We will take our leave here. We also have other work waiting for us."

Leaving those words behind, Charles and his underlings quickly left the basement.

Only Rio and Vanessa were left behind.

Healing Magic  
"...I'm sorry. I will immediately call for a mage who can use Heal .  
Can you stand?"

Vanessa walked to the side of Rio who collapsed face down and called out to him.

Rio ignored Vanessa's voice and tried to stand up by himself.

"Tsuu..."

Rio immediately lied down on the floor after feeling intense pain in his whole body.

"Don't force yourself. There might be fractures in your bones. I'll carry you, so stay sti--"

Vanessa reached out her hand to tend to him while speaking.

“Don’t, touch me...”

Rio slapped away the hand that was reaching out to him.

Vanessa stared dumbfounded at her hand from the shock she received.

“That’s, sorry. I’ll go call someone who can use Heal to this place. Wait for me quietly.”

Vanessa made a conflicted expression and left that place for the moment.

# Chapter 4

Vanessa called Celia to the basement where Rio had received the interrogation.

Because Rio's wariness was strong right now, she thought that it would be better to bring a person who he knew, even for just a little bit, rather than someone who was utterly unknown.

Although at present, when picking someone who Rio was acquainted with, wouldn't feel wariness against, and could also use healing magic, there was nobody else but Celia who fit the criteria.

Celia readily accepted and went to the basement.

"Err, he is unconscious isn't he? "

Rio was unconscious from meeting his limit both physically and mentally.

"He must be at his limit because of the pain, exhaustion, and stress."

Vanessa's face clouded in helplessness.

"Uu..."

A groan leaked out from Rio's mouth.

"...This is a terrible injury. It looks like his whole body was strongly beaten up. If he is unlucky there might be fractures in his bones. He has to be treated immediately."

While saying that, Celia gently took off the cloth on Rio's upper body and began checking his injury by touch.

"Please. It looks like he was terribly tormented by Lord Arbeau's

interrogation.”

“What an unpleasant man. Doing such a thing to a child this small. Even though he can just interrogate normally.”

“This is just my suspicion but the interrogation must be only his pretension on the surface. His position in the royal guards is in danger due to the case this time. He is becoming desperate to obtain an achievement even just for a little bit more.”

“...That’s detestable, for a gentleman to not know when to give up like that.”

Celia muttered and frowned.

“Truly. That’s especially the case when it comes to a noble.”

Vanessa agreed with a bitter smile.

“Then I’ll start the healing now. Heal.”

Celia finished checking Rio’s state and chanted the spell of healing. Then, a geometrical magic circle surfaced on her hand. Gentle light was enveloping Rio’s body, healing the injury.

“That’s amazing. I heard that there will be a difference in effect depending on the user, but to use Heal this splendidly. Even among the royal court mages you won’t be able to find that many who are able to do the same.”

Vanessa spoke in admiration seeing the swelling was receding in the blink of an eye.

“...Thank you for the praise.”

Celia nodded shortly. She took a deep breath while continuing to focus still. The treatment finished before long and the magic’s movement halted.

“For the time being he is healed to the point that he can at least move. Well, he is asleep though. I think it will be better to continue

after bringing him to a bed. Let's allow him to rest."

"It looks like there are various scars on his body, but... those are old scars. I wonder if he was also receiving abuse in the slums."

Vanessa spoke after discovering several old scars on Rio's upper body.

"Yes, most likely. Those are that type of scars."

"Is it impossible to erase the scars?"

"I'm sorry. It would be a different story if it's right after the injury happens, but after time has passed, it's impossible to heal a scar cleanly."

"I see..."

Both of them made a cheerless expression.

"Let's bring him to the guest room."

"Yes."

Rio was then moved from there while still unconscious.

Rio opened his eyes on a warm and fluffy bed in a guest room of the royal castle.

"Nn..."

His eyelids opened slowly. Then, an unfamiliar ceiling entered his sight.

*This place...*

He tilted his head while lying down and confirmed the inside of the room with sleepy eyes.

It was a spacious and clean room. The ceiling was high, and

furniture that looked of high class were placed everywhere. The extravagant interior produced a classic atmosphere.

It was tremendously different from the isolated basement's solitary cell that only provoked one's despair.

Rio lifted up his upper body and tried to obtain even more detailed information, but the movement of his strangely listless body was dull. When he gave up attempting to lift his body and entrusted his body once more to the bed,

“Oops, looks like you woke up. Good morning. How are you feeling?”

A girl's voice came timidly from the side.

When Rio turned his gaze to the direction of the voice's source, there were two girls sitting on a leather sofa. Their age was around the middle of their secondary growth period.

One was a petite girl wearing a lovely noble outfit. Her pure white hair extended gently until her back. She had lovely features like a winter fairy.

The other girl had short blond hair. Although there was still a trace of childishness remaining in her body build, she had a gorgeous look that was like a sculpture. Her appearance was the so-called waitress uniform, with colors of white and navy blue that genuinely brought about an elegant atmosphere.

It seemed these two beautiful girls were having tea right beside the sleeping Rio.

“You still have to rest. Your wounds were healed by magic, but it doesn't mean that your weakened stamina has also returned. Besides, healing by magic forcefully recovers the injury, but the backlash from that makes it easier for inconveniences to result in the places that were injured.”

The white-haired girl said that while standing up from the sofa and walking toward Rio.

“Err, you are? ”

Rio kept lying on the bed while asking for her name with a bit of wariness.

“I am Celia. Celia Clair. I talked with you for a bit at the slum, right? Though at that time I was wearing a hood.”

“Aah, you were...”

Now that she mentioned it he had heard her voice before. It was a warm and gentle voice that sounded pleasant to the ear.

Rio immediately noticed that Celia was the petite person at that time.

“Fufu, best regards. And this girl here is--”

Celia turned around, and she was going to introduce the girl in the waitress uniform behind her but,

“Nice to meet you. I am called Aria Gavaness. I am currently employed in the castle as a head servant. As of this occasion, I am appointed with the responsibility of assisting Master Rio. Please kindly treat me well.”

The girl who introduced herself as Aria courteously bowed. Her tone was businesslike and completely monotone, but her way of talking was respectful and didn't give the person hearing it an unpleasant feeling.

“Nice to meet you. I am...called Rio.”

Rio used Aria's speech as a reference and returned a courteous greeting even though somewhat crudely.

If the other party interacted courteously with him, he too would endeavor to interact courteously with them, that was the stance of the human called Rio--no, the human called Amakawa Haruto.

“Excuse me, where could this be? ”

Rio asked timidly.

“This is a guest room in the castle. You were unconscious, so you were healed with magic and then brought to this room.”

Celia smiled softly and explained.

“I...see. Thank you very much.”

Rio made a complicated expression and told his thanks. He couldn't let his guard down seeing how the two before him were also people of the same country as those who hurt him, and his feelings became harsh when he recalled the nightmare that had occurred in the underground room, but it didn't change the fact that he had received help from them.

“It's fine. I heard the story. Rather it's I who is in the position that has to apologize. I'm sorry that you had to meet such a terrible experience.”

Celia bowed her head and apologized with a grieving heart.

Not even the slightest bit of discrimination toward the orphan Rio could be felt from her. Come to think of it; when they first met at the slum, it was also only Celia who interacted gently with him.

Honestly speaking; currently, Rio was harboring disgust toward the existence called royalty and nobility.

Because the majority of the royalty and nobility that he had encountered until now consisted from only highhanded and arrogant people, he was unable to clear away his bias toward people of the privileged class.

But among them, there were also people like Celia. When thinking so, there was no way he could decide that all royalty and nobility were unconditionally detestable humans. Rio corrected his perception slightly.

“It's not like you were the one who did anything bad.”



Rio looked down and spoke with an emotionally suppressed voice.

“No, but still...”

Celia was at a loss for words while looking like she wanted to run away.

Just as Rio said, it wasn't like Celia had done anything terrible to Rio.

Even so, when thinking that her fellow countrymen had given unreasonable treatment toward Rio, Celia couldn't help but feel guilty.

“More importantly, what will happen to me after this? ”

“For the time being you should be asked to have an audience with his Majesty the king tomorrow, but after that, I also don't know what will happen. You are the benefactor of Lady Flora...her highness the second princess, so I think nothing bad will happen to you but...”

“Do I really have to meet the king no matter what? ”

“Yes. Because a formal thanks needs to be given to you in regards to the case this time.”

Rio frowned with a conflicted expression at Celia's explanation.

Honestly speaking, he truly wished to bid farewell from this kind of castle immediately. To say nothing of how absurd it was for him to have something like an audience with the king. But, this place was inside the castle, and the other party was the ruler of a country. There was no way Rio's opinion would be accepted if he said that he didn't want to meet the king.

He instantly understood that and he made a heavy sigh.

“It's not like I have done anything significant...”

“That's not true. You had done various things at the behest of Lady Flora's request. Surely you will be awarded with a reward. I

understand that you must be feeling heavy, but it's better to receive what you can receive. Right, Aria? ”

Celia turned toward Aria who was staying quiet.

“I think so. I can guess at how you are feeling, but it will be difficult to reject this. In that case, perhaps it would be better to have a positive thinking as much as possible.”

Aria talked with a detached tone.

“I see. Certainly that might be so.”

Rio made a slight smile with a feeling of resignation. The mature smile that didn't match the age of his external appearance caused the eyes of Celia and Aria to widen slightly.

“I'm sorry but can you teach me about the manner of being in the audience of the king? Like the etiquette or the manner of speech. As expected I also cannot just meet the king while staying ignorant.”

Rio asked and bowed his head.

“Yes, of course.”

“If that's your wish, because that is my job.”

Celia and Aria immediately replied and accepted Rio's request.

Around that time, inside of the throne room of the Beltram Castle.

King Philip Beltram--alias Philip III, was sitting on the throne. In front of him were gathered several nobles. Each of them was an influential people who were involved with the national politics.

The nobles that had gathered were divided into three factions. The factions were divided left and right as they huddled together with their fellow faction members.

To the left of the throne was the faction belonging to Duke Arbeau that possessed the greatest number of members, to the right side of the throne was the faction belonging to Duke Huguenot that possessed the second greatest number, and the faction belonging to Duke Fontaine that possessed the third greatest number.

Here was the simple explanation regarding the current political background and power relations surrounding the Beltram Kingdom.

First, King Philip III still has yet to reach thirty years of age. He was a young king who had only ascended to the throne just a short while ago.

It seemed that inexperience became a negative effect on him. When the previous king died from sickness, Duke Arbeau, who was a top authority at that time, skillfully influenced him.

Duke Arbeau was trusted by the previous king and had gained the right to appoint royal guards, but just before the previous king died, he misused that appointment right and sold favor to the younger people of the influential nobles who were unable to succeed their house's peerage by placing them into the royal guards. As a result, Duke Arbeau assumed the position of the royal guards' captain while also boasting tremendous influence inside the royal court.

Duke Huguenot and Duke Fontaine who incidentally also inherited their peerage around the time when King Philip III ascended to the throne were late by a step and for a long time they continued to taste hardship from the faction of Duke Arbeau.

Duke Arbeau who possessed influence in the government while also having military authority was an existence that was like a thorn not just for King Philip III, but also for the factions of Duke Huguenot and Duke Fontaine.

As time passed and Duke Arbeau's authority was increasing, he seemed to be growing impudent, or perhaps it was his true nature coming out. In the recent years, he was starting to get arrogant. Others viewed the prominence of Duke Arbeau as a significant problem.

Almost as if it was a coincidence, the abduction of Flora occurred.

The royal guards that protected the royal family allowed the kidnapping of the second princess Flora to happen. That was why it was a significant failure that Duke Arbeau, the captain of the royal guard, couldn't shut his eyes from.

In actuality, it was his son Charles who was in charge of the security at the scene, but naturally, the security responsibility also fell on Duke Arbeau. Or rather, this was the perfect chance to make Duke Arbeau take responsibility.

“As expected, the incident this time is proving that the quality of the royal guards is decreasing, isn't that correct?”

Duke Huguenot spoke with a cool voice.

Marquis Rodin who belonged to his faction agreed to that statement.

“It's indeed as you say. For the royal guards to be outwitted by a lowly bandit, I think this is a little bit too careless for them.”

“The security was...flawless.”

Duke Arbeau gave an excuse with a faltering tone, but there existed no proper excuse that could cover up this failure.

“Even if you stated that the security was flawless or whatever, it's meaningless if it's not accompanied by a result. It's fortunate that Lady Flora was safely found, but I wonder, how are you planning to take responsibility for this matter?”

Duke Huguenot asked about the responsibility with a chilly expression.

“...The mastermind behind the kidnapping and their base still haven't been exposed. I believe it won't be too late even if I take responsibility after that matter has finished.”

Duke Arbeau made a face as though he was sucking a sour grape

while answering.

But Duke Huguenot and Marquis Rodin looked like they were in their element hearing that.

“What are you saying? That’s exactly why you ought to take responsibility immediately.”

“I concur. The investigation can still be done even if it’s not by the royal guards. Above all else, the current royal guards that overlooked the bandit’s infiltration and kidnapping cannot be trusted with this important work.”

They immediately rebutted. Duke Arbeau made a sour face and stared at Duke Huguenot and Marquis Rodin whose age was about half of his.

*These greenhorns...*

Duke Arbeau cursed inside his heart.

“It’s just as the two of them said, Helmut.”

King Philip III who had been silently watching the argument until now opened his mouth. Helmut was the name of Duke Arbeau.

“Yo, your majesty...”

Duke Arbeau faltered. His complexion naturally looked bad.

“Recently the decrease in quality of the royal guards is becoming a problem. Perhaps there is a necessity to attempt the reformation of the royal guards after the incident this time.”

After King Philip III stated this, the people who belonged to Duke Huguenot’s faction nodded in satisfaction.

The people who belonged to Duke Fontaine’s faction also showed an understanding expression.

“From here on, the right to appoint royal guards will return to us.

I'll have you resign from the seat of the captain of the royal guards, and also order a demotion punishment to Charles who was in charge of the security at the scene of the incident. The seat of captain and vice-captain will become empty because of that, but Alfred Aimard will fill that empty spot."

King Philip III disclosed the content of the punishment. Although he was the king, it was hard to take back an authority that was once given by the previous king without reason, but it was a different story if a failure had occurred. Of course, he couldn't forgive that his cute beloved daughter was kidnapped, but the incident this time was also truly fortuitous for him.

"Kuh..."

Duke Arbeau's face almost turned into a grimace. The glory of his family that he had built up painstakingly until now had crumbled instantly. Thinking about that, it wouldn't be strange even if he went hysteric.

But as expected from a great noble with a long history Duke Arbeau suppressed his emotions and formed a smile and immediately performed the salute of a vassal.

"By your will."

Noticing that Duke Huguenot was grinning sarcastically, a muddy black emotion was welling up inside his heart. However, even then Duke Arbeau's smile didn't crumble.

It was only now that that man could feel full of himself. Someday he would make a comeback. At that time he would return this humiliation many times more. And then, he absolutely wouldn't forgive the person who caused the incident this time.

Duke Arbeau hardened his determination inside his heart.

Duke Arbeau was suspecting that someone among the enemy factions was the mastermind behind this incident, but it was hard to imagine that the faction of Duke Fontaine, who was loyal to the king, was the one that caused the kidnapping of a princess this time.

The possibility was high that it was Duke Huguenot's faction, but even if that was actually the case, there was no way that they would do anything that would easily expose their scheme. There was no objective proof or anything remaining behind, and even the man who seemed to be an assassin which could become the prominent source of information had died.

The young boy called Rio, who was accidentally there, was also suspicious, but seeing that Duke Huguenot wasn't looking anxious at all, perhaps that boy was really unrelated. Duke Arbeau was thinking along that line.

Besides that, he thought that he should also perform a preparatory step for now.

"Your majesty, what are your plans regarding the treatment of the aforementioned orphan named Rio? "

Duke Arbeau asked while vigilantly gazing at the reaction of Duke Huguenot's faction.

"Hmm, he is an important witness who grasped this case's information, but he is also Flora's benefactor. Even if he is just an orphan, there is also no way we can be ungrateful. We are thinking to grant him some form of reward."

"However, is it not dangerous? There is also no guarantee that that boy isn't involved with any kind of force."

"Hou, I had heard that your son had performed enough of an interrogation toward that boy though. Don't tell me you are asking for a freedom to do even more torture? Are you saying there is a need for that without even providing any definite proof? "

King Phillip III asked with his eyes narrowed quietly.

"Of course, I'm not asking to inflict torture toward a benefactor of her highness the princess. But it's also a fact that there is no proof that that boy is completely innocent."

The roundabout insistence of Duke Arbeau caused King Philip III

to frown slightly.

“Then, what are you proposing? ”

“Yes-, in my humble opinion we should monitor that boy for a while.”

“Hmm, we too are thinking about that. Flora is feeling really grateful to that boy, so we are quite reluctant to do so, but as expected that is necessary. ...Garcia.”

After saying that, King Philip III sent his gaze toward the faction of Duke Fontaine.

“Good gracious, was I called? ”

A man of old age came forward from inside the group. He was a man with a straight back and a face that looked gentle at a glance but other people were opening a path for the old man with a cautious look.

His name was Garcia Fontaine. He was the previous head of the house of Fontaine two generations ago, but even now he possessed influence that wouldn't be considered little as the king's advisor.

“We are thinking of enrolling the aforementioned orphan in the royal academy. We wish to entrust you with the task to do the necessary procedure for that.”

A commotion that wasn't small was spreading in the throne room because of King Philip III's words.

Beltram Royal Academy--, it was an academic organization that was placed at the peak of Beltram Kingdom whether as a research institution or an educational institution. Several educational institutions or coaching schools for wealthy people existed in the regional towns and cities, but other than this Beltram Royal Academy, no other academic organization was managed by the government.

The location of the school was adjacent to the royal castle. It boasted a vast size of ground and owned an elementary school, middle



school, and high school, but the middle school and high school, rather than being educational institutions, was markedly pronounced as research institutions for specialized fields.

Every year the academy churned out a lot of specialists in various fields like martial arts, magic, scholarship, etc. Among the royalty and nobility, those graduating from the royal academy would grant a high status. The academy was a gateway for success both in name and reality.

Although there was an entrance examination in order to be enrolled, pedigree and wealth played a big role. Most of the students were the young people of the royalty and nobility. It had no history of opening its door to the commoners. In other words, people who could enroll were limited even among the young people of the royalty and nobility.

The nobles inside of the room were understandably surprised because an orphan with an unknown background was going to enroll in such an influential and prestigious educational institution. But Garcia stroked his chin and made an understanding look by himself.

“I see. So that brat’s personage can just be entrusted to the academy.”

“That’s right. Enroll him within a few days. We will leave it to you.”

“By your will. It’s a nice timing that that girl of the Clair’s is working as a teacher at the academy’s first-year elementary course. I will enter that brat into her class.”

Garcia put his hand on his chest and bowed his head deeply.

The time for Rio to have an audience with King Philip III finally came. The throne room was also called the audience room. A formal audience with the king would be held in this place.

An intense atmosphere was drifting about inside the room. The

ceiling was high, and everywhere inside the rectangular space, extravagant and beautiful decorations had been applied. It displayed an authority that would overwhelm those entering.

Straight ahead from the entrance, on the platform at the deepest part of the room, the king's family--the King Phillip III, his legal wife Beatrix, the first princess Christina, and the second princess Flora--were sitting on chairs with dressed up appearances. They were looking down on the inside of the room.

The elder sister Christina was making a firm and tense expression with a face that still had a trace of childishness remaining, but her little sister Flora looked a bit awkward, perhaps because she was nervous.

On the other hand, the nobles who were employed in the royal court were lined up at both sides of the passage. As expected, they too were dressed up formally. They were the people who were in attendance to watch the audience that would start from now.

"The young boy who saved her majesty princess Flora will enter the place now."

The signal of the announcer resounded clearly inside the silent space. Then, the big door of the audience hall slowly opened. All the people inside sent their gaze toward the door.

There, a black-haired boy was standing. It was Rio. His hair had been cut. Although there was still a trace of innocence remaining in his looks, it exposed his well featured and androgynous face openly.

The black hair that was hard to find in this country brought forth an exotic atmosphere. Coupled with his well-ordered face that attracted notice, the royalty and nobility inside the hall stared at Rio with curiosity.

"So that's the child who saved her highness princess Flora."

"He has a rare hair color. Looks like he is a child of an immigrant."

While the audience hall was stirred up, Rio tensed his handsome

face and walked calmly on the red carpet that was stretched out through the room up to the throne. The stylish formal outfit that was tailored for children was still looking imbalanced. Usually, the feeling of a kid forcing themselves to act like an adult might be distinctively felt from such an appearance.

But, in contrast with the outward appearance, Rio's expression looked terribly grown up. Yes, if a youngster noble his same age was in his position right now, it wouldn't be strange for them to be paralyzed with nervousness and tremble, and yet Rio's movements were really calm.

There were also people who were sending admiring gazes toward such a dignified attitude but,

"Hmph, a mere lowly poor orphan acting like that..."

"Well, he is unexpectedly doing well out there. He is moving following the etiquette."

"Somehow, it looks really queer."

And so on, many of the gazes watching Rio were filled with discrimination. Quiet conversations were spreading. In contrast, Rio treated those like a passing wind. He was slowly walking with a cool expression.

Rio then arrived before the stairs that continued to the above platform. He came to a stop there, kneeled, and bowed down his head, and then he followed the etiquette that he was taught and waited quietly until he was addressed.

"Rio, raise your face."

King Philip III announced solemnly.

"Yes-, I'm honored."

Rio reverently replied, then he slowly lifted his face. Ahead of his gaze was the king's family. King Philip III was on the throne at the highest spot, while his legal wife Beatrix, the first princess Christina,

and the second princess Flora were sitting side by side on the chairs a step below.

Flora was looking down on Rio embarrassedly while acting strangely fidgety.

On the other hand, Christina was sitting with her back straight, although she was staring fixedly at Rio's face with dubiousness. Perhaps after Rio's long messy hair was cut off, the impression he gave to her was completely different from before.

Both Christina and Flora were beautiful girls with light purple hair. It was clear from a glance that they were sisters, but the atmosphere they gave was really different as though the polar opposite of each other.

Flora's purple almond-shaped eyes were sparkling radiantly. Her skin was white but slightly reddening. In contrast, Christina was frowning as though she was in a bad mood, and when her gaze met Rio, she averted her face in a huff.

"You have done well in rescuing our daughter at this chance. Truly a great achievement. We give you our thanks."

King Phillip III expressed his thanks to Rio with a pompous tone.

"I am extremely delighted to receive such words that are unworthy for me."

Rio replied reverently.

"You are showing a really splendid behavior. Have you learned the manner for having an audience beforehand? "

"I have no words. It's nothing more than a half-baked preparation that I only hastily learned, but that I manage to avoid any disrespect is wholly thanks to the assistance of the people who bestowed me their aid."

King Phillip III gave a hint of admiration in his expression at Rio's manner of speech.

“We have been told beforehand to forgive any etiquette that is too stiffening, but your endeavor is laudable. We heard that you were living in the slums, but was your birthplace in this country? ”

“Yes-. I was born and raised in this royal capital Beltram.”

“Hou, and your parents...? ”

“I heard that my father and mother were adventurers who traveled across countries. It seemed they migrated to this country from the Far East, settled down here, and gave birth to me, but both of them have departed from this world.”

“I see. Immigrants from the east. And then you ended up living in the slums. Looks like you have had a really eventful past for being that age. We have asked you something painful. Pardon us.”

“No. It’s already a matter of the past.”

Rio made a troubled expression and shook his head.

“I see. By the way, I’m thinking of granting you a reward in regard to the case this time but--”

After speaking that far, King Phillip III cut off his speech for a moment and gazed at Rio.

“How about it, won’t you try getting enrolled into our Beltram Royal Academy’s elementary school as a scholarship student? If you wish it, you will also receive preferential treatment for employment for when you graduate. If you cultivate satisfactory grades, then we will also support your advancement to the middle school and further.”

The king spoke the content of the reward in specifics. Rio’s eyes turned wide at the talk that suddenly took place.

“That is, ...a reward that really surpassed this one’s wildest imagination.”



Although Rio said that, he was showing a face that looked slightly hesitant.

Indeed, Rio who was raised as an orphan was overwhelmingly lacking in this world's culture and common sense. Being able to attend an exclusive educational institution wasn't a bad offer.

But, from the civilization level of this world, he could easily imagine that all the students who attended Beltram Royal Academy consisted of the younger people of the royalty and nobility. What would happen to Rio if he went to that kind of place as someone without any status at all? His feelings became heavy when imagining that.

Although, the current Rio had no choice at all. If he refused, it was unclear whether they would really let him go quietly, on top of that he was also someone with no definite means of how he would live starting from tomorrow onward.

Rio instantly finished calculating those matters in his mind and,

“If your majesty allows, then I wish to accept your majesty's kind offer by all means.”

He obediently accepted the reward proposal.

King Phillip III nodded deeply.

“Right, then it's decided. We will take responsibility for the necessary expense for your enrollment until your graduation. Other than that, we will also bestow you with a hundred gold coins as reward money.”

The inside of the hall became slightly noisy. That was because it was an exceptional treatment.

The currency that was currently circulating in the market was small bronze coins, large bronze coins, small silver coins, large silver coins, gold coins, and magic gold coins. Six kinds of coins existed. From the small bronze coins until the gold coins, the exchange rate

between each type of coin was by the factor of ten toward the type above and below each type.

For example, ten small bronze coins could be exchanged for one large bronze coin, and ten large bronze coins could be exchanged for one small silver coin.

However, only magic gold coins were treated specially. The amount of that coin which was currently circulating in the market was few; consequently, gold coins became the currency with the highest value when it came to ordinary transactions.

The enrollment fee for the Beltram Royal Academy elementary school was ten gold coins, and the tuition fee each year was thirty gold coins. In other words, it cost forty gold coins in total for the first year, and every year after that it would cost thirty gold coins.

The average yearly income of nobles without territory was forty gold coins. From there it could be understood just how much value this reward had.

In the first place, for the people who were obsessed with a discrimination principle even among the nobilities, just the fact that a lowborn orphan enrolling into the prestigious Beltram Royal Academy was already a disagreeable situation. If that orphan was given that much money in addition to the enrollment, there was no way they wouldn't feel hatred.

Rio somehow noticed that the atmosphere inside the hall had changed, but,

“My sincere gratitude for the extraordinary kindness your majesty has bestowed to this one.”

Ignoring that, he deeply bowed his head.

The headmaster's office of the Beltram Royal Academy was located in the highest floor of the spire in the main building.



The headmaster, Garcia Fontaine, called the teacher in charge of the elementary school first year, Celia Clair, to his office.

When Celia entered inside, Garcia sat down on a stately official chair inside the room. From the balcony behind him, the scenery of the royal capital Beltram was spreading out.

“Headmaster Fontaine, excuse me. Are you calling for me? ”

“Yes. Thank you for coming.”

After Celia greeted, Garcia nodded with an exaggerated gesture.

The wrinkles that were carved on his face showed his advanced age, but even in his old age, Garcia was an old man with a youthfully dominating aura.

“Why I’m calling for you is none other than about the orphan whose enrollment was decided at the audience the other day.”

“It’s about Rio? ”

“That’s right. It’s decided that he will be entered into the class that you are in charge of.”

“I see, I understand.”

If it was a normal teacher, it wouldn’t be strange if they showed reluctance to an orphan, who seemed like they would become a source of trouble, was entered into their class. Celia on the other hand accepted it without making any particular objection.

“You are still young and it hasn’t been long since you became a teacher, but I’m holding expectations for you. I’ll leave this to you.”

“Yes. I will do my best to answer that expectation.”

Celia tensed her expression seriously and replied.

“Hmm, about that. The main topic will be from here but.... Celia, what do you think after interacting with that aforementioned orphan?

I want you to tell me your opinion frankly.”

“Let’s...see. I think he is mature for his age, it seems he is a really intelligent kid.”

Celia answered after thinking for a few moments.

“Hou, can you give me an example about what you mean? ”

Garcia asked looking really interested.

“First, he properly understood the situation he was put in. On top of that, I was also able to see his attitude that greedily attempted to learn what he was lacking. Perhaps his discernment, adaptability, and learning ability are really excellent.”

Celia explained her impression about Rio systematically.

“Hmm. He got dragged into the princess’s kidnapping incident and then taken away into the castle. He received an interrogation that was practically torture. He was forced to enroll into the royal academy after receiving the order that was under the guise of reward. Did he show any dissatisfaction regarding those matters? Ignition. ”

Garcia asked that before chanting a spell. A small magic circle floated on his fingertip and a fire was lit. He brought the fire close to the pipe in his mouth and then inhaled. Smoke was starting to puff up.

“He might have looked reluctant, but he didn’t speak out any dissatisfaction.”

“I see.”

Saying that, Garcia blew out smoke from his mouth. He then stared at the smoke drifting in the air and made a pondering face.

“Err, is there something about Rio? ”

Celia asked when she was unable to read the purpose of this talk.

“It’s nothing, I’m just thinking that his reaction is really unlike a child.”

Garcia answered ambiguously.

“A reaction like a child, is it? ”

A question mark floated above Celia’s head and she tilted her head.

“Right. For example, Celia. If you suddenly got thrown into prison, beaten up by unknown men, and then after that you were safely released, what would you think? ”

“...That’s the worst. It would undoubtedly become a trauma. I might become unable to trust other people after that.”

Celia answered with a sorrowful face. When she tried imagining herself in Rio’s place, she could feel that it was a gruesome happening that surpassed her imagination.

“That’s how it is. You are a girl so perhaps you find it excessively terrifying, but isn’t that reaction fitting for a child--no, for a human? Such a thing would make anyone want to mutter their hatred and resentment toward the other party that carried out such unreasonableness even if only once. Among them surely there will be calm people who can suppress their emotion and be mindful of their position, but few people can do that even among adults.”

Garcia’s way of speaking was strangely filled with significance. Celia narrowed her eyes quietly.

“...In other words, what does headmaster wish to say? ”

“Well, based on from what I heard from you, it looks like he isn’t showing any reaction like a normal child. The etiquettes he showed in the audience hall also looked so appropriate that it was unthinkable that it was really only a hasty preparation.”

“That’s, it was because I taught him the necessary etiquettes. At first he didn’t know anything at all about such thing.”

Celia was getting sullen without her noticing it herself and replied as though to cover for Rio.

“Right, when I asked it seemed that it was the boy who asked to be taught the etiquettes, isn’t that right? But a normal child won’t be thinking that far.”

“That’s why, I thought that he was an intelligent child.”

Celia cut in at Garcia’s roundabout talk with a hard voice.

“Certainly he might be an intelligent child. There are also existences like Princess Christina and you who make the title of genius seem like nothing when you aren’t even twelve years old. It also won’t be strange if the harsh environment of the slums was nurturing him to be like that. Or perhaps, it could be--”

After saying that far, Garcia’s face quietly turned expressionless.

“Or perhaps, what? ”

Celia asked with a serious face.

“No, it’s nothing. It seems that he will be facing various difficulties from now on. I want you to indirectly pay attention to that as his homeroom teacher. If there is something that catches your attention then report it to me. I can entrust this job only to you.”

Garcia made a composed smile and said so.

“Yes, I don’t mind that but...”

Celia felt befuddled. She made an expression that wasn’t really convinced.

“Of course I understand that you are busy with your research. Surely you coming and going from the castle these few days would also cause delay to it. I don’t mind if you do what I’m asking only to the degree that won’t cause any hindrance to your research.”

“...Yes. Understood. Is that all? ”

She was curious about what he was thinking, but it didn't seem like he would tell her if she asked. Celia wanted to quickly leave from this place.

“Yeah, you can leave now.”

“Then, excuse me.”

Celia bowed briefly and turned around.

*It's really difficult for me to deal with this person.*

Celia let out a small sigh while thinking of such thing.

Rio put his hands through the sleeve of the Bertram Royal Academy's uniform and walked through the corridors of the academy following the guidance of his homeroom teacher Celia. He was following the small back that felt slightly unreliable to be a teacher.

“How does the uniform feel? ”

Celia looked back while walking and talked to Rio.

“It's not bad. The fabric feels durable, and it's really easy to move in.”

He answered and lightly moved both his hands to ascertain the sensation of the uniform.

“That's because it's a custom made article that was created based on the demands of the students throughout the successive generations. It also doubles as battle clothes.”

“I see. So that's why it's designed to look like a knight's uniform.”

“Yes, stylish right? The uniform of the female students is also cute you know? ”

Celia said that with a slightly playful smile.

“Ahaha.”

Rio was troubled about how to react and smiled wryly. Putting aside whether he should look forward to the female student’s uniform or not, certainly the uniform of the Beltram Royal Academy was fashionable.

Just as Rio said, it had a design like a knight’s uniform. The boys wore trousers, while the girls wore skirts. There was also a disparity in the design that was matched to make up for the difference between male and female, but there wasn’t that much gap in performance between them.

“We’ve arrived.”

After walking and talking for a while, Celia stopped in front of a specific classroom.

A noisy atmosphere could be felt from the other side of the room. Inside there were a lot of young people of nobility that would be hard to deal with. Evidently, they were amusing themselves with conversation before the homeroom.

*So it’s here.*

Rio recalled the path that he walked up to this classroom and compared it with the geography of the school’s ground. He should be able to come to this classroom starting tomorrow without getting lost.

“It looks like you aren’t really nervous.”

“That’s not true.”

Rio shrugged his shoulders slightly and denied that.

“Is that so? Your expression is really nonchalant considering that though.”

“That’s because I was often told even in the slums that I’m someone whose emotion doesn’t really come out in my expression.”

Rio answered with a wry smile.

“I see..., well that’s fine. Let’s go in.”

Celia then opened the door.

The next moment, the inside of the classroom that had just been overflowing with commotion became dead silent.

“Everyone, good morning. As of today, there will be a new student joining this class. Rio, come in.”

Celia spoke while entering the classroom briskly and came up to the teacher’s podium.

“Excuse me.”

Rio lightly bowed and entered the classroom, following behind Celia.

It was spacious inside the classroom, as though it was a small hall. From the front where the teacher podium was located until the back of the class, the floor was slanting up in the shape of a staircase. Desks and chairs that were bolted on the spot were lined up.

The number of students in each class was around 40. There were a total of three classes for each grade.

When Rio came up to the podium, the gaze of the students inside the classroom pierced him. Conversations in small voices were breaking out everywhere.

“Hee, so that guy is the orphan new student.”

“Orphan? That kind of guy is enrolling into this glorious royal academy? ”

“Yeah, from what my father told me, it seems he raised an achievement and his enrollment into the royal academy was recognized.”

“...Isn’t it some kind of mistake? ”

And so on, the male students were carrying out conversations curiously. It seemed the rumor that an orphan would enroll had been spreading already.

On the other hand, speaking of the female students’ reaction,

“Black hair is really unusual, isn’t it? ”

“Yes, I was wondering what kind of beast would come.”

“His look is unexpectedly cute don’t you think? ”

“If he dressed up in female clothing and a wig, then it feels like he could pass as a girl.”

“Hmmm, well, his face isn’t bad but, he is still an orphan.”

Mainly they were giving various evaluations of Rio’s looks.

The reaction of the boys and girls were odious, but they already had the sense of values as nobles living in a society that emphasized social position imprinted on them. The gazes that were directed at Rio were filled with discrimination.

“Now, everyone please be quiet. He will introduce himself now.”

Celia looked around the classroom while sighing and saying that.

After confirming that the whispered conversations of the students had stopped, Rio took a step forward.

“I am called Rio. Due to the chance born of the boon from his majesty’s good office, I am allowed to attend this hall of learning even as unworthy as I am. There are many aspects that I am lacking, but I will give my best effort not to be a bother for everyone, so please take care of me.”

He deeply bowed while introducing himself and giving a greeting.



It was a polite self-introduction that was faultless, or rather it was too overdoing it for a seven-year-old.

But, if he had to introduce himself toward the young nobles, it was just fine to act too menially. It was a greeting line that was created by the cooperation of Celia too.

In the end, was that prediction not mistaken or not?

“My, it seems he understands the minimum manners.”

“Yeah, seems like he can at least talk like a servant.”

“An orphan is talking in that kind of way.”

And so, for the time being, he didn't earn their displeasure by using such speech.

There wasn't even a single applause. They were talking as though they were watching a rare animal. They were observing Rio while obviously belittling him.

Despite the fact that starting today he became a student of the royal academy like them, in their eyes Rio, who was an orphan living in the slums until recently, was an inferior existence, he wasn't an equal existence to them.

*I'll have to attend to this kind of place for six years at the very least...*

Rio was making a dejected sigh inside his heart when feeling the atmosphere that felt unpleasant. He wouldn't be troubled about the clothing, food, and living place here, but when he imagined the life ahead of him, he was becoming depressed.

*But, this is better than staying in that slum. I'll learn everything that is useful.*

If not, there would be no meaning in him coming to this academy.

Rio understood from his heart the necessity of education. Without

knowledge or skill, the jobs he could obtain in the future would be limited, and in life, one wouldn't know what would be useful and where.

Although it was because of the course of events that had just transpired forcing him to attend this academy, now that it had become like this he had to make use of the merit to the maximum effect.

When he lifted his bowing head, Rio briefly looked across the classroom. There, ...*Hm?*

Among the students inside the classroom who were showering him with their gaze, he found a familiar face.

The position was at the back of the classroom near the window--, that person had straight long hair with a purple color, which was loosely tied by a barrette. Beside her sat a cute girl with blonde rolled up hair.

When the girl with light purple hair--Christina Beltram's gaze met Rio's, "hmph", she huffed slightly and looked aside. He had thought this in the audience hall too, but it seemed he was really hated. After all, their first encounter with each other was like that, so it was understandable.

*Well, it's best not to get involved. The other side is also planning to do that.*

It was certain that Christina wasn't harboring a good feeling toward Rio. Rio too didn't have the slightest sense of getting involved with Christina.

"Then, starting from today on Rio will become a member of this class. Surely there are various things that he is unfamiliar with, so help him if he asks a question or is looking troubled okay? Get along well with each other."

Celia spoke with a bright voice to erase the strange atmosphere drifting inside the classroom.

But there was no reply from the students. Celia sighed lightly.

“...Then Rio, you can sit anywhere there is an empty seat. That will become your seat from then on. My recommendation is the seat at the very front.”

That way it would be easier for Celia to watch out for him somehow.

“Understood. Then.”

Rio moved to an empty seat at the front of the classroom and sat down.

“Now then, today there is also no particular notification, so let’s move to the lesson right away.”

In Bertram Royal Academy, each subject had different teachers in charge. Even though they were called teacher in charge, there was no way they could be in charge of all the lectures. Perhaps it was fortunate that Celia was in charge of the lecture of arithmetic which was the first lecture he received at Bertram Royal Academy.

“I think everyone who passed the entrance examination is already able to do the simple four fundamental rules of arithmetic, but today I’ll ask all of you to solve a problem with a bit higher difficulty.”

While saying that, Celia was writing the questions on the large slate that was standing on the teaching podium. The content of the questions was something so simple that the students of Japan’s lower grades of primary school could solve.

“Then, please solve the questions I’m writing on the slate now.”

Celia said after finishing writing several questions on the slate. The students immediately moved their feather pens and began to solve the questions. After confirming that, Celia moved to Rio’s front.

“Now, Rio. I am still unable to grasp how much you can do, so I

want to confirm it. Can you solve the questions written on the slate? ”

“I’m sorry. In the first place I am unable to read letters.”

Rio answered the question that Celia whispered.

“I see. It’s necessary to teach you starting from letters and numbers then.”

Celia made a worried expression. She was pondering for a few moments like that then, “Then, I will give you some personal guidance, so after school can you go to my research room...at the basement of the tower that has the library? For today, please keep receiving the lectures as it is.”

She said that in consideration of the progress of the whole class too.

“Yes. I understand.”

Rio obeyed that decision obediently. It wasn’t his intention to delay the progress of the class just for his sake alone. After that the lesson continued without any hindrance and the first hour of the arithmetic was finished.

The first hour of lectures finished and now was a break time.

Celia left the class for her next class, and only the students were left in the classroom.

A strange atmosphere started to fill the classroom. A blank space was created around the seat where Rio was sitting alone at the front of the classroom. Countless gazes were showering him.

\*Whisper whisper whisper whisper\*

“It looks like that guy cannot do arithmetic. He was only listening to the teacher’s talk all through the class.”

“Yeah, it must be that. He enrolled here without receiving the entrance examination.”

“After all he is an orphan you know, an orphan. There is no way he has received a proper education. In the first place can he even read letters? ”

“Uwaa, why is that kind of guy enrolled in this academy huh.”

Perhaps the existence of an orphan that originally they would never be involved with was curious for them. The students were staring at Rio from a distance while talking with quiet voices. And then, mocking chuckles could be heard--.

*Well, they will get bored of it before long.*

Although he was feeling discomfort as though he was put on a bed of nails, no real harm reached him. He could ignore it if it were just this much. He was becoming a spectacle like this for now, but he thought that the more time passed, all of them would lose interest. Rio made a small sigh.

“Say, you. Do you have a minute? ”

Then, at that time, a girl’s voice resounded. The voice that was addressing Rio was from a girl who was walking down the passage calmly from the back of the classroom. It was a familiar voice; furthermore, he had heard it recently.

Rio’s gaze was pulled toward the voice’s owner. There, the cute girl with the blonde rolled up hair sitting beside Christina stood.

The girl’s strong-willed eyes that were opened wide were staring at Rio in exasperation.

*Could she be the girl who was together with Princess Christina at the slum?*

Because Rio had familiarity with the girl’s voice and tone, he guessed her identity. He didn’t really know her face at the time because she was wearing a robe, but if he remembered correctly her

name should be Roana.

“Do you have some kind of business with me? ”

“What do you mean "Do you have some kind of business with me? ". At the lecture just now, what was the meaning of that? ”

The girl who seemed to be Roana sighed exaggeratedly and spoke briskly.

“...My apologies. What could you possibly mean? ”

Rio tilted his head when he was still unable to guess the purpose of the talk.

“It seems that you have learned the minimum manners in talking, but you, you cannot even read numbers right? ”

“Yes.”

Rio calmly acknowledged it. Then, the girl raised her eyebrow.

“Can you stop fooling around? This Beltram Royal Academy is a learning hall that has boasted prestigious tradition and social standing. All of us are here after clearing through the difficult examination. And yet you, who are unable to even read letters, that’s not any different from a monkey.”

The girl spoke in indignation. There an agreeing voice came from the side.

“No, truly, it’s just as Miss Roana said.”

The new voice that interrupted came from a handsome boy with a well-ordered face. Rio and the girl--Roana who was talking to him turned their gaze toward the boy.

“What is it Alphonse? Right now I’m still talking with him.”

Roana seemed to be displeased that someone interrupted her. Her eyes quietly narrowed while asking.

“Pardon my rudeness. It’s just that, although it’s already displeasing simply when a lowborn enters the sight, for one of them to enter this Beltram Royal Academy, it is truly a nightmare.”

The boy who was called Alphonse talked coldly.

“The enrollment of this person was decided by his majesty the king. If you are expressing your objection about that that would be barking up the wrong tree you know? ”

“Yes. It’s just as you say. But, while that may be true, it won’t be amusing if this guy held a misunderstanding. And so, I’m thinking to make it clear in this chance.”

Alphonse formed a smug smile on his lips and agreed, then he looked over the students inside the classroom.

“What do you mean? ”

Roana asked suspiciously.

“Don’t think that you have become equal to us, that’s what I mean. The people here are the chosen even among the royalty and nobility. It would be unpleasant if a lowborn misunderstood and acted over-familiar with us.”

After saying that, Alphonse glared at Rio without even trying to hide his scorn. Surely it would be pointless no matter what he said to someone whose bigotry was this strong.

Would this boy be satisfied if he lined up a speech that abased himself appropriately--while thinking of such thing, Rio accepted the boy’s gaze without any change in his expression.

“I won’t dare to do such impudence--”

“I haven’t given you any permission to speak, lowlife. Don’t butt into the conversation of nobles. It’s unpleasant.”

When Rio opened his mouth, Alphonse formed a triumphant smile as though he had been waiting for it and made his statement. Then,

the inside of the classroom fell silent for a moment.

The next instant, chuckles and cold laughter welled up from here and there.

Alphonse watched such a reaction of the students while making a satisfied smile. Rio made a faint cold smile and kept silent.

“Alphonse, that’s enough. If you came just for ridiculing him like this, then leave right away.”

Roana spoke with a voice that was tinged with exasperation.

“Yes, well then. Excuse me.”

Alphonse nodded and returned to the back of the classroom with brisk footsteps and a satisfied expression.

Roana turned her gaze to Rio and opened her mouth once more.

“It’s the continuation of before that interruption. Frankly speaking, right now you aren’t worthy for this academy.”

“My deepest apologies. I am just someone ignorant and illiterate.”

“It seems so. But, the more you are left behind, the more you will also drag us back, and it will also throw mud at the academy’s name.”

Roana accepted Rio’s humble words as it was.

“It’s just as you say.”

“Then work as hard as you can. And then show a result. There will be an examination at the end of term in this Beltram Royal Academy. That’s all that I wish to say.”

“Certainly. I swear to endeavor with my all so that I won’t be a hindrance to everyone. Lady Roana, thank you very much for your consideration.”

Rio expressed his thanks and bowed his head courteously.



“That’s fine. This too is a duty of me who is serving as this class’s representative in the place of Lady Christina. Even if that’s not the case, it’s the role of noble to guide the commoner.”

Surely she was saying that from her heart. Roana was trying to guide Rio as the class’s representative and a noble. Such sense of purpose and responsibility could be felt from her. Because of that, Rio felt no malicious hostility like Alphonse from Roana’s statement.

After school on the first day Rio received classes, he visited the library tower where the teachers set up their laboratory.

The first floors up to the third floor of the tower were used as a library. The parts other than that were allocated as the laboratory of the teachers who worked in the academy. Celia’s laboratory was located at the basement of the library tower.

After entering the tower from the entrance of the library’s first floor, there were a significant number of books inside the building. They were all packed tightly into the bookshelves and divided based on the field of study.

Rio was interested what kind of books the library had, but unfortunately, he was visiting today for a different matter. He took care of the necessary procedure in the reception, and then he headed straight to the laboratory underground.

A long corridor was stretching underground. Magic lamps were illuminating the passage.

“Here huh.”

Because the receptionist had taught him where Celia’s room was located, Rio was able to arrive without getting lost. He was unable to read the letters written on the nameplate that was attached to the door, but there should be no mistake.

\*Knock knock\*. Rio slowly knocked the door.

“.....”

However, no reply came from the other side of the door.

“Is she not here? ”

Rio tilted his head in puzzlement and knocked one more time. This time he tried knocking stronger than before. \*Knock knock\*. But, there was no reply again.

teacher

“Celia-sensei, is she not here?”

\*Knock knock\*. He continued to knock while saying that. If there would still be no reply with this, he would give up for today and go back. When Rio was thinking such a thing, the door was opened hard.

Rio jerked in surprise. The door was opened to the inside, but if the door was a type that opened to the outside, it might've collided with him dangerously.

“Aaaah, geez! That's noisy! Can't you read the letters on the plate? Right now I'm in a good part that's, why...”

Celia came out from inside the room while raising a protesting voice, but when she saw Rio's face, her momentum weakened bit by bit.

Rio was dumbfounded seeing Celia as such. His image of Celia until now, which was that of a pure and secluded young lady, was crumbling down.

“Err, I'm coming about the matter of the personal guidance though...”

Rio made a twitching smile and timidly broached the matter of his business here.

“Heh? Ah, yes. Tha, that's right. It's good that you have come. I have been waiting, right! ”

Celia made a pondering face, gasped, then she put up a lovely

smile and spoke to cover up her mistake.

*She completely forgot.*

Thinking that, Rio made a wry smile. But, just in case he matched his talk with her.

“I’m sorry Sensei that I need to take your time for my sake like this.”

“It’s fine. As a teacher there is also no way that I can just leave you behind by yourself.”

Saying that, Celia smiled a bit awkwardly.

“Thank you very much.”

“Yes. Then, don’t just keep standing over there, come inside. ...ah”

When she turned around to invite Rio inside the room, Celia stiffened.

*This is bad. I forgot that this boy is coming, so I didn’t clean up my room!*

“Is something the matter? ”

Celia was anxious inside her heart. Rio called out to her from behind.

“Eh? A, aa, no. Yep. Right now the inside of the room is just slightly messy, but that’s, don’t you mind it.”

Celia made a fake smile with all her might and spoke misleadingly.

“Yes, it’ll be fine.”

Rio nodded. Like that he entered inside the room.

*...This is, just a bit?*

Rio's expression cramped seeing the chaos inside that surpassed his imagination.

The room boasted quite the size which was around twenty tatami mats.

Books, documents, and tools with unknown utility were scattered all over the floor. The top of the tables were also overflowing with books, documents, and even a plate filled with a half-eaten light meal or a cup of tea and so on. It was unthinkable that this was a room of a really cute maiden.

“No, normally the room is more in order! Right now I'm a bit busy and my research has reached the good part, so it's like, I was putting off the cleaning up...”



Perhaps Celia had noticed the change in Rio's complexion, she was making excuse with blushing cheeks.

“The, there are a lot of books that look difficult isn't it? Sensei looks really young so it's amazing!”

Rio was unable to find a skillful reply and pointed at a random book that entered his sight and praised Celia. That was Rio's attempt to forcefully changed the topic and cover up the awkwardness.

“Eh? A, aa, yep. I am still twelve years old after all. Originally I should still be attending the elementary school, but I skipped a grade and graduated from even the high school!”

‘Ehem’, Celia puffed up her chest that had a size which was fitting for her age and boasted. Her cheeks were still slightly red, but it seemed she had got on the diverted topic.

“That's, really amazing.”

“We, well yes! Actually I want to specialize in the research of magic and focus completely into it, but researchers here have to do teacher work in their spare time no matter what.”

Celia spoke talkatively.

Her acting like a grownup was cute. Rio made a small smile.

“Err, then I will make some space, so you wait for a bit.”

Saying that Celia started to tidy up the mess on the chair and table at the center of the room that was used for reception. The things seemed to be placed disorderly, but perhaps there was an order to it because Celia was performing the separation of the various items there quickly.

It looked like it would be bad if he carelessly tampered with the position of the books and documents, so Rio was staring at that scene from behind.

“Tsu...”

Because Celia was bending down while doing her work, her fluttery skirt moved, and sometimes it felt like he could catch a glimpse of the inside. The legs that were stretching out smoothly brought about an alluring charm that didn't suit her age.

Rio quickly averted his gaze and let out a small sigh at Celia's defenselessness.

After that, her work was finished in a few minutes, and Rio sat on the chair while facing Celia who was sitting on the other side. Writing materials were put on the table.

“Then, let's begin.”

“Yes.”

“Having said that, what should I start teaching you from? ...Let's see, then, do you understand what the meaning of numbers is? ”

“I understand.”

Rio immediately answered Celia's question.

“Hmmm, then, there are five books here. Rio has finished reading three of them. How many books haven't you read? ”

Celia gave a simple question in order to confirm whether Rio really understood.

“Two books.”

Rio answered instantly.

“My, so you really do understand.”

Celia's eyes opened wide in surprise.

“Since you are able to do subtraction means you can also do addition right? Then, what is the meaning of this? ”

After saying that, Celia moved the feather pen on the table.

She was writing a simple addition problem on a paper.

“Err, I cannot read letters so...”

Rio answered with a troubled look.

“That’s, right isn’t it. In other words, you cannot read numbers but you can do calculation?”

“That is the case.”

“That’s mismatched. Well, it’s not impossible, I think? Paper is expensive after all...”

Celia made a pondering face and reached an understanding by herself.

“Then, for now it’s fine if I only teach you numeric characters. Then it will save me a lot of time, that’s something welcome for me. I will write the numbers from zero to nine here, will you be able to remember it?”

Celia smoothly wrote the numeric characters while speaking.

“I understand.”

“From the left is zero, one, two, and so on. The number is getting bigger by the order. Tell me if you finished memorizing them. I will give you arithmetic questions to test how much you can do.”

“Yes.”

Even while nodding, Rio was moving his finger and memorized the numbers. The numeric characters written on the paper had really simple shapes. He finished memorizing in only a short time.

“I finished.”

“Eh, already? Then, write the numbers zero to nine on here.”



Celia flipped the paper and handed it to Rio. Rio quickly wrote the numbers.

“Correct. Your writing is beautiful. Then let’s quickly have you try solving addition and subtraction problems. I’ll also teach you the arithmetic symbols.”

Celia spoke in admiration.

“Yes. Can Sensei give me questions at the same level that is being taught in the class right now? I wish to confirm how much I can do.”

“If it’s the same level like the class, the four fundamental rules of arithmetic...multiplication and division will also be included, but as expected that’s excessive right?”

“Perhaps I’ll be fine. For multiplication, if six children are going to be given five apples each, how many apples are needed in total? It’s that kind of problem right? And then the division is the reverse of that.”

“Ye, yes. That’s right, where did you learn that? ”

Celia asked in wonder.

“...I learned from my mother.”

It was a lie. He simply had finished learning the four fundamental rules of arithmetic in the previous world’s compulsory education a long time ago. For Rio, as long as he was taught the numeric characters and arithmetic symbols, that would be enough. But there was no way he could tell Celia the truth.

If he said that he learned from his dead mother, there would be no way to confirm the truth, because of that surely no one would investigate too much. Like that, Rio would be able to omit the majority of the pointless process.

“I see, your mother was really cultured wasn’t she? ”

Thinking that she had asked something terrible, Celia’s expression

was slightly clouded.

“Yes, she was a kind, and warm person...”

Rio’s expression also clouded slightly.

“Err, then, if that’s the case, you are able to do the four fundamental arithmetic then. I’ll give you questions at the same level as in the class. Try to solve them.”

Rio nodded “Yes”, then Celia took out a new piece of paper. There she was writing questions one after another. There were twenty questions, and they included all four of the fundamental arithmetic.

“I wrote the symbols that are used when writing the symbols of the four fundamental arithmetic. From left is addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Now begin.”

After Celia gave the signal, Rio quickly took a look at the questions. From the viewpoint of Rio as Haruto, they were only a collection of extremely simple questions.

“I finished.”

Rio solved all the problems in only ten-odd seconds. Because he concentrated too much, he didn’t notice Celia was watching him while in shock.

“All the answers are correct...”

Celia seemed to have checked the answers while Rio was answering the questions. She immediately told him the result.

“Then it doesn’t look like I have a problem with arithmetic. Next I have to memorize letters, but compared to numbers letters have more variation isn’t it? ”

“Eh? Ah, yes. That’s right...”

“Is something the matter? ”

Rio noticed Celia's ambiguous reply and asked that in wonder.

“How should I say it. Rio, you are able to do mental arithmetic really quickly aren't you? ”

„ “Is, that so? Aren't everyone in the class also able to do this much?

“Not that fast. In my class perhaps only Princess Christina can do that. Roana is also quite fast, but she isn't as fast as Rio.”

Celia talked with a twitching smile.

Here Rio noticed his own blunder. He thought that most of the students possessed a high education level because this was the greatest educational institution in the country.

He had seen the students acting proudly about their own scholarly ability, and he heard that it was necessary to learn the four fundamental rules of arithmetic for the entrance examination.

From this, Rio misunderstood that obviously, they could do this much.

“Well, I often performed calculations in my head. My mother, she told me it would surely be useful someday.”

Rio was slightly agitated while quickly preparing excuses.

“Is, that so...”

Celia stared at Rio in suspicion. Rio nonchalantly ignored that gaze of Celia.

“Sensei, are there books to learn letters that are intended for children? ”

He asked.

Celia made a slightly complicated expression.

“...There are. I’ll teach you, so you can borrow them from the library when going back.”

She sighed slightly and replied like that.

“Thank you very much.”

“It’s fine. This too is the job of a teacher. By the way, what do you think of life in the academy after spending this one day here? Tell me if there is something you are unhappy about.”

Celia made a face of a homeroom teacher and asked.

The event that happened at break time today crossed the back of Rio’s mind. But he didn’t feel any particular need to report that to Celia. This was still his first day enrolling here, and in the end the opponent was only kids.

“No, there is nothing particular.”

“Is that so? ”

When Rio easily shook his head, Celia made a slightly surprised face. She looked like she wanted to ask something, but she didn’t know what to say.

“Err, you see. Like, were you able to make a friend...”

Finally Celia asked timidly.

“Friend? No, everyone is a noble, there is no way I can interact with them over-familiarly.”

Rio answered calmly. Then, Celia’s face turned troubled,

“Hmm, well, that’s the case but...you see. Is it difficult just as I thought? ”

Celia sighed. Rio tilted his head.

“What is it? ”

“No, if possible I too want to cooperate so you can make friend. But you know, the human relations of nobles are troublesome in various aspects. There are also children who are annoying when it comes to things like social status or pecking order. If I carelessly meddle then the children who feel dissatisfied might come out instead.”

Celia spoke inarticulately.

“Sensei is also a noble aren’t you? ”

“Well, that’s true.”

Celia smiled wryly and sighed.

“For me it’s not really a problem. I wish to focus on studying for the time being.”

“Ahaha.... Your attitude like that, should I call it grown up or dry? ”

When Rio spoke decisively, Celia let out a dry laugh.

“Is that so? ”

“That’s so. The children of nobles too are really grown up for their age, but at heart they are just children. Their desire to show off is really strong. But you are different. It feels like you are taking action after thinking which is necessary and not.”

“...I see.”

“Well, just because of that doesn’t mean that it’s problematic or anything. It’s just, I’m simply feeling a bit perplexed because you are unexpectedly not a handful. Sorry, I’m saying strange things.”

“No, thank you very much for thinking of me by that much.”

Saying that, Rio deeply bowed his head. If it was any other teacher there might not be anyone else who would treat him this cordially.

“I told you. That’s the job of teacher. If something happens then

come and talk with me without reservation. I don't know whether I will be able to render assistance, but I'll at least listen to you."

"Yes."

Celia talked with a warm smile. Rio replied with a soft smile.

After borrowing a book to learn letters from the library, Rio returned to the dormitory tower that was located inside the academy's ground.

The room that was lent to Rio was located on the highest floor.

The view was good, but it was troublesome to climb all the way up there. Because of that, the location wasn't popular, and there was an empty room which was allotted to him. From here on he would be staying in this room for at least six years.

For high ranked nobles, they would have another residence in the capital other than their own residence in their territory. There were a lot of students who commuted to school from their own residences, even so just as to be expected from a facility where the younger people of royalty and nobility lived at, the rooms of the dormitories were really spacious.

The size easily reached 20 tatami mats or more. Necessary furniture was also completely provided. It seemed it was also possible to bring a maid from home or they could pay a certain amount of money to hire an exclusive maid from within the academy. It was truly more than satisfactory.

The time was evening. Rio put a chair near the window and stared out at the scenery outside.

The sky was dyed red. Because the dormitory inside the academy's ground was located at a high ground even within the capital Beltrant, the city and the surrounding farms could be seen from above there.

The majority of the scenery that was reflected in his view consisted

of Mother Nature. Forests with plants growing thickly, mountains that were towering high, and only a few areas that were touched by human's hand could be seen.

It was utterly impossible to see this kind of scenery in Japan.

Within several days since his memory returned, the change in his environment was too dizzying. He didn't even have the leeway to ponder about the change that happened with his body, but now that he was able to allow himself some time alone, his feelings were strangely turning sentimental, and various emotions were flooding him.

"So this place is another world as expected."

Rio muttered and sighed deeply. He didn't know of any country like the Beltram Kingdom, and the civilization level here was also too different from Earth. Above all else, something like magic existed as though it was only natural.

It was like a world in a game with a fantasy theme.

He wanted to believe that this was a dream. But, it wasn't a dream. This place wasn't Japan; it wasn't even on Earth.

"I died. Yes, died. Died.... Ha, haha..."

A dry laugh spontaneously slipped out from Rio's mouth. With the fusing of Haruto and Rio's consciousness, there was a continuation of ego, because of that the death of Haruto didn't feel really real until now, but when he spoke out the fact, a hard to describe emotion welled up.

The current him wasn't Amakawa Haruto but a different person called Rio. In this world, it was only him alone who knew about Haruto. When he thought about that, he wanted to go home to Earth very much.

He missed his family, and he also wanted to meet with Miharuru just one more time. He was dreaming of meeting her and telling her his feelings. He wondered if it was alright to call this kind of feeling

homesickness.

But, it didn't seem like there was any way to return back to Earth. He also didn't understand how he had gotten reborn because there was no way a dead person could come back to life in the first place--.

What remained for Rio who was living in this world was only his important memory with his mother and his violent emotion toward the man who trampled that. There was only that reality remaining for him.

Wasn't it just too unreasonable? Wasn't it too merciless?

Rio gritted his teeth strongly and stared out at the scenery spreading outside the window with sharp eyes.

There the sky that was so callously beautiful was spreading. Right about now the evening sun was going to sink behind the faraway horizon. Seeing that, Rio swore inside his heart; he would live.

There was no way he could stop now.

If he stood still, then Rio would lose his meaning of life.

Dying in this kind of place while not understanding anything and without achieving anything, he couldn't accept something like that. He couldn't accept giving up. He would live strongly and persistently.

He thought that. It was something that Rio himself swore a long time ago, but now that the personality and memory of Haruto were dwelling inside him, Rio renewed his determination once more.

But, that would be a long and harsh path. Perhaps Rio was still unable to understand its harshness. The brittle, transient, grim, and empty thing that was ahead of that path.

In the outdoor practice ground of Beltram Royal Academy, there were the figures of small students wrapped in their uniforms gathering in groups. Rio was also among those figures.



“A noble has to learn the minimum of martial arts.”

The muscular man standing in front of the students said that. At present, Rio and the others were receiving martial arts class. The male students were holding wooden swords and shields while the female students were holding wooden poles.

“Continuing from before, today you all will learn about form. Do five sets of the form that was taught in the previous class, with one set consisting of repeating the form ten times. Do it slowly to confirm your motion. When you have finished, form groups of two with another student and do five more sets while checking each other’s form.”

After the instructor commanded that, the students, especially the male students, we’re starting to swing their wooden weapons in high spirits.

“Rio. You still don’t know the form, so I’ll teach you directly. Come with me.”

As instructed by the instructor, Rio obediently followed him. Their destination was a spot that was distanced from the other students. The two of them faced each other with a moderate distance between them.

“Rio, you, have you held a sword before? ”

“Yes. More or less.”

Rio confirmed. However, strictly speaking, he hadn’t held a sword but a katana. He had only held the katana that his grandfather of the previous life had.

“Hrm, I see. Then, first I’ll check how much you can do. Try hitting me once with that sword. Come at me anytime.”

Right after stating that, the instructor then took a stance with his sword.

*How should I say it, this person is really sports-minded.*

The simple development of the conversation caused Rio to make a hint of a wry smile.

This instructor must be a type of person who let the body do the talking rather than with words. Although, from Rio's point of view, the instructor's stance was practical with no pointlessness. His strength should be the real thing.

*But, I wonder why.*

Rio pondered while confirming the grip of the sword.

He still didn't understand the principle, but if he used magic power and increased his body's physical ability, most likely he would be able to land a hit. Rio had that confidence.

But if he showed a movement that surpassed the limit of not just a kid but even an adult even though he hadn't even learned magic, there was no doubt that the instructor would think that something wasn't normal. If that happened, he wouldn't be able to avoid giving an explanation.

*It's safer to do it with my base physical ability. Let's do it suitably.*

As Rio decided, he took a normal kendo stance. Although, because he had never learned the sword art that combined the use of sword and shield, he took a stance that somehow resembled that.

"Is that an original stance? "

"Yes, that's right."

"I see. It looks like you have some talent."

The instructor grinned.

The next moment, Rio started running straightforward.

Approach and slash. Sword art was something like that. To carry that out, Rio approached the instructor and swung his sword with the intention of testing the water.

Then, the instructor easily blocked Rio's sword. "Hou", he muttered in admiration. Then he stared intently at the way Rio held his sword and how he directed the blade.

"That's good swordsmanship. That way you also won't hurt your wrist."

As expected from an instructor, his discernment seemed to be an excellent one, Rio judged.

He was thinking to hide the fundamental skill that he had learned in the previous life, but it wasn't something that could be hidden so easily. Although, because he wasn't used to handling a shield, his stance became slightly unique.

Rio swung his wooden sword. Swung, and swung.

But the instructor beautifully handled all of those attacks. It was obvious. There was no way a child's strength would be able to surpass the instructor in a contest of strength; furthermore, it was also the same with his speed.

If there was a possibility for him to land a hit, it would only be by relying on technique, but if he fought by making full use of the skill that he learned from his grandfather in his previous existence, as expected the instructor would think that it was abnormal.

*Well, this person too surely isn't thinking that I would be able to land a hit.*

Rio judged the situation calmly.

"Hm. That's good Rio! You slightly lack in passion, but you are suited to become a knight! "

The instructor said with a smile. As expected he seemed to be a hot-blooded person. Honestly speaking, it felt slightly stuffy.

"Unfortunately I have no interest in becoming a knight."

"What? Well, it's fine to do it in the academy life. I'll teach you the

sword art of a knight so don't worry."

He wondered where a factor that wouldn't make him worried exist in that. In the first place, their talk didn't connect with each other.

Rio smiled wryly while swinging his sword. Then, there,

"-!"

Suddenly a sharp attack from the instructor came at Rio. Rio reflexively back stepped and dodged.

"Hou. So you can react to that attack just now."

The instructor muttered in admiration.

"Sensei isn't supposed to attack right? "

"There is no such rule! But, I understand your true strength. That's enough."

The instructor then lowered his wooden sword. Rio followed suit and lowered his sword too.

"Your power and speed aren't really anything much because you are still a kid, but your movement is extremely fluid. You are really talented in handling a sword. It would be even better if you used the shield to make a strike among your attacks."

"Thank you very much."

"Right. Then I'll teach you the form now."

"Please."

Rio bowed his head briefly.

For a while after that, Rio studied the style of Beltram Kingdom's sword art from the instructor.

Because Rio was able to easily copy the movement just from watching the form several times, the instructor also got amused and

displayed the other forms one after another. Like that they forgot the passage of time and, “Oops, it will be time to return soon. It looks like some of the students are starting to finish too.”

Rio walked together with the instructor toward the spot where the students gathered.

Then, suddenly, he felt a gaze. Rio sent a glance toward that direction. Ahead of there, he found Christina and Roana.

The other students didn't even pay attention to Rio who was at some distance away. The boys were swinging their sword enthusiastically to show off their good side to the girls, while the girls were watching that while talking noisily.

“Hmph.”

Christina huffed in a bad mood and immediately averted her eyes. Roana who was paired with her was staring still at Rio with a slightly taken aback expression.

*Did they see that?*

Rio thought wonderingly. But, even if they actually saw him just now, it wasn't like he was doing anything special.

*Well, it doesn't matter.*

Rio immediately lost interest and averted his gaze from the two.

Like that, half a year passed since Rio enrolled into Beltram Royal Academy.

At first, he gathered attention as though he was a spectacle and there were a lot of interferences from the students that were half in jest, but as time passed, the students' interest toward Rio was also thinning down. They had gotten bored.

It would be interesting if he had gotten red and objected when they

were looking down on him, and yet Rio didn't say anything back no matter what they were saying to him. He did nothing but lower his head and only replied back with safe comments.

Even so, there were still students who meddled with Rio, but their foul language toward him was becoming repetitive and was completely waning down.

The students became apathetic toward Rio, and right now he was treated as an existence that didn't matter whether he was in the classroom or not. Rio too didn't do anything in the slightest to try to get involved with the students.

Thanks to that Rio too was able to pass his time concentrating on his studies and training for a while.

He received classes in the academy from the morning until the afternoon. After school, he would shut himself inside the library and study. When he returned to the dormitory, he would practice swinging a sword so that his body's movements wouldn't dull.

Every day he repeated that and spent days without any variation in it.

There was worth in doing that. Rio was able to grow stronger steadily.

And then, the day when his result took shape arrived.

It was the day when the second semester started. Beltram Royal Academy adopted the semester system where the schedule was divided into first semester and second semester. Every semester an end-of-term examination would be held. Today was the day that the results of that examination would be displayed. The general rule was to notify each student about their grades individually, but it was a custom that was limited to the top ten rankings, they would have their rank along with their full name displayed on the bulletin.

A lot of students were crowding in front of the bulletin board that was set up in the corridor of the first year. Everyone there was agitated without being unable to hide their shock and bewilderment.

“Don’t screw around! That filthy lowborn is this academy’s number one? ”

The second son of the house of Marquis Rodin, Alphonse yelled with a trembling body. Ahead of his gaze was the result sheet of the end-of-term examination that was put up on the bulletin board.

There Rio and Christina were tied for the first place. At the third place was Roana’s name, and Alphonse’s name was put at sixth place.

In other words, with the exception of Christina, all the students in the first year lost to Rio.

A lowly orphan who didn’t even have a family name. A poor student who just half a year ago couldn’t even read letters. Someone who they were looking down in the beginning because of that reason. A bug which wasn’t even registered in their eyes anymore.

It was a humiliation that was hard to endure. To the degree that they spontaneously doubted the authenticity of the fact.

“This is some kind of mistake! There is no doubt that he was cheating! ”

Alphonse yelled loudly.

Then, his friends around him unanimously agreed “That’s right, that’s right! ”.

They were the chosen existences. They had worked hard in studying since they were little until now and passed the hurdle of the entrance examination of Beltram Royal Academy. And yet, an inferior existence who couldn’t even read letters a few months ago, a lowly orphan surpassed them. There was no way such a thing could happen-, there was no way such a thing was allowed to happen.

Therefore, there was no doubt that there was some kind of mistake with the results of this exam. There was no doubt that Rio was cheating. Alphonse and others couldn’t help but think so.

Beside Alphonse and others who were making a commotion like

that, two girls were staring quietly at the bulletin board. Christina and Roana.

Although, the looks of the two were far different. Christina was staring at the bulletin board with a sullen expression like usual, in contrast, Roana was making a dumbfounded face while being speechless.

*This me am third? It's natural that I'm not a match against Lady Christina, but I lost against that boy who couldn't even read numbers?*

Roana didn't harbor any doubt that she would be second place. She possessed the absolute confidence that it would be the natural result of her talent and the effort she had piled up until now.

However, when the lid of the matter was opened, Roana was in third place.

Considering that Beltram Royal Academy was the educational institution that was the top in the country, and there were more than one hundred students just in the first year alone, being in third place wasn't a bad achievement at all. It was a position that she should be proud of.

But, even so--.

'Right now you aren't worthy enough for this academy'--suddenly Roana recalled the words that she had told Rio half a year ago.

She was exasperated at Rio who was unable to even read letters, and then she spoke those words with a sense of purpose and responsibility that as a noble it was her duty to guide the commoner and that as the class representative she mustn't let the academy's quality decrease.

*It's me who am not worthy!*

Roana felt her face heating up from shame. The words that she spoke toward someone weak as someone overwhelmingly stronger became a boomerang that returned to her. It was unbearably



embarrassing.

“You bastard! ”

Suddenly a loud voice resounded nearby.

Roana’s body jerked and trembled. Her gaze moved toward where the voice came from. There several students led by Alphonse were surrounding Rio.

“Say it, what kind of dishonesty did you do? ”

Alphonse pressed Rio for an answer while appearing as though he was going to seize his collar.

“There is no such thing. I was simply receiving the exam normally.”

Rio answered calmly.

“Don’t lie! There is no way that you could reach that position if you didn’t cheat! ”

“I don’t understand what you could possibly mean...”

Rio spoke half in exasperation at the one-sided false accusation.

Alphonse glared at Rio with a bright red face.

“You must have bribed the examiner or cheated!”

“I think there is no way such acts are possible though...”

“I don’t care. You must be using some kind of dirty trick anyway! ”

“I was only working hard after being told not to hold everyone else back.”

“There is no way that’s true! ”

Rio made a small sigh at Alphonse who wasn’t listening at all. Even though he had repeatedly told him not to hold them back beforehand

when Rio obtained a result that was better than them it became like this.

*If I knew it would've become like this perhaps it would've been better if I cut corners...*

Because Rio had no friends in the academy and most of the time he was learning things like the letters or common knowledge of this world, Rio was unable to measure where he was standing in comparison to the students around him.

To grasp that, he seriously tackled the exam this time without cutting corners, and it ended up with this kind of result. By the way, his grades were a perfect score in every subject.

He thought that perhaps he would get a high ranking, so he had planned to only peek at the results and then leave quickly, but he was found out by Alphonse, and it ended up like this.

*What should I do...*

If it was possible, he wished to leave this place quickly, but it didn't seem likely that the other party would quietly pull back even if he talked with them. Then, he wondered if he should just leave forcefully.

While he was having such thoughts,

“Oi, say something?”

Alphonse talked to him in displeasure.

“Stop it, Alphonse. The jealousy of a gentleman is unsightly to see.”

Roana had approached unnoticed and interrupted.

Alphonse's face stiffened from those words that hit the mark.

“I, I can't allow that false remark to pass. I am simply trying to expose a dishonesty to light...”

“The position of first isn't something that can be easily obtained

just by being dishonest. Do you have some kind of concrete proof of what kind of dishonesty it was that he did? ”

“Tha, that is...”

Roana talked smoothly. Alphonse was at a loss of how to respond.

“If you don’t have proof, what you are doing is nothing but a one-sided false accusation. It’s an act that is dirtying the academy’s dignity. I cannot overlook that as the class representative.”

Roana spoke with a strong tone. Furthermore, as though to deal a further blow, “I heard the story, although it was only from the middle. It’s just as Roana said, Alphonse.”

Celia suddenly appeared out of nowhere and spoke that.

“Cla, Claire-sensei...”

“There is no fact that a dishonest mean has been at work toward the academy, so there is also no reason that an accusation of dishonesty can be accepted. The result this time is completely something that Rio gained from his effort. I’ll be the one to guarantee that.”

Celia spoke decisively.

“Kuh...”

Alphonse was completely at a loss for words and his expression distorted in frustration.

“H, hmph, I won’t recognize this! ”

Leaving behind that parting remark, he left with quick footsteps. His hangers-on followed behind him.

“Everyone, if you have finished confirming the results quickly head to the classroom. Homeroom will be starting soon.”

After Celia clapped her hands while saying that, the onlookers in

the surrounding began to scatter to all directions. Rio was liberated from the situation where he was turned into spectacle.

“Thank you very much.”

Rio lowered his head and thanked Roana and Celia.

Roana huffed “Hmph” and replied back.

“...It’s not like I interfered for your sake. I won’t lose next time.”

She refused his thanks bluntly and turned around. Without a pause, she left with a quick pace.

Rio and Celia watched her back from behind.

“She isn’t a bad girl. Though her pride is high and her sense of responsibility and purpose is strong, that’s why she is harsh both to herself and other people.”

Celia talked with a wry smile.

“Looks like it.”

Rio shrugged his shoulders casually and agreed.

“By the way, Rio will also be studying in the library today after school?”

“Yes, that’s my plan.”

“I see. Then, let’s have tea in my lab. I’ll call out to you at a suitable time.”

“Yes, I understand.”

And then, after school that day.

Rio visited Celia’s laboratory and brewed tea with hand manners without any pointless motion in it.

When he finished the broad process and reached the point where the tea was moderately heated, he poured the tea inside the teapot into the teacups. Then, an aromatic floral scent began to drift inside the room.

After pouring the last drop of tea into the teacups, Rio presented a cup to Celia.

“It’s done, enjoy.”

“Thank you. As I thought, the tea has to be brewed by Rio. Even though it’s the same tea leaves, when it was me who brewed it, the aroma was completely different.”

Celia enjoyed the aroma drifting from the tea while saying that.

“I’m only brewing it following the instructions in the book. Everyone can do it if they learn the method.”

“That’s not true. There is a method to make it delicious, but the difference will come out depending on the maker.”

Celia made a cheerful smile while drinking the tea with an elegant pose.

The primary occupation of teachers belonging to Beltram Royal Academy was fundamentally as researchers. Being a teacher was, in the end, nothing more than a duty that was assigned to them as something to do sparingly.

Because of that, even homeroom teachers would have some interest for their students. Few teachers had the vigor to proactively try to get involved with the students outside of class. To say nothing of the fact that this kind of case where a teacher was intimately holding a "tea party" with a student frequently was extremely rare.

Rio’s relationship with Celia had curiously grown into where they periodically drank tea together like this. The impetus was when Celia invited Rio who was striving to study by himself by visiting the library every day.

At a glance, Celia simply looked like a pure and quiet young lady, but in contrast with that appearance, inside her personality was unexpectedly amiable and uninhibited.

She had an unfortunate flaw that when she got passionate about her research, the voices from around her wouldn't reach her.

Celia was different from any royalty and nobility that Rio had met until now. She wasn't haughty toward Rio who was a former orphan, and she also didn't make any speech or conduct that was looking down on him.

Perhaps because of that, the two of them immediately hit it off with each other since they started doing this tea party, and now their relationship had become so close that they could talk naturally with each other.

In his school life where he was surrounded by enemies from all sides, Celia was the only one who could make Rio ease up.

"Also, congratulations with your first place in the end-of-term examination. That's amazing. I know that you are working hard every day, but that's not a ranking that anyone can get."

"...Thank you very much."

Rio expressed his thanks with a bit of embarrassment.

"But, it's a bit worrying."

Celia made a gloomy expression.

"What is it? "

"It's about Alphonse. He made a strange false accusation to Rio right? "

"Yes, well. "

"I think you already understand well enough, but the students in this academy have a strong sense of competition. There are a lot of

children who hate to lose. The noble's characteristic status consciousness is mixed into it, so it's troublesome in various aspects. For example, there is also the childlike Alphonse today who goes wild."

"Putting aside when I enrolled at first, for a while now it has been peaceful though."

Rio made a wry smile while saying that.

"I think at first they were picking trouble because of curiosity, but they soon lost interest. Also, that was because they were perceiving Rio as someone who is definitely lower than them. They were telling you various things as they pleased right? It's admirable that you didn't flare up to them."

"Even if I got angry and objected, it would be just like pouring oil into a fire."

Rio shrugged his shoulders slightly while replying.

"Exactly. It's no good to properly react when they are finding fault with you, but with the exam this time everyone should have reevaluated Rio as an existence that is threatening their position. That's why, perhaps they will be finding fault at you even more than before."

Celia spoke with a cloudy expression.

"Even so, as I thought I will be fine. I'm already used to it."

Rio answered nonchalantly.

"But, ...noble's bullying is nasty you know?"

Celia spoke a bit uneasily.

*Was that based on her own experience?) --Rio thought.*

"I know that Celia-sensei was an excellent student, but could it be that you were also having a similar problem? "

“Well, various things happen in human relationships. I received various unacceptable words from girls whose family have a higher status than mine.”

“And then, sensei couldn’t endure that? ”

“No way, I ignored them all.”

“That’s what I thought.”

Rio let out a smile at Celia who was easily telling him that.

“Muu, but it was really terrible! That’s, in my case I had more friends than Rio, that was why I was fine.... I’m worried because Rio is alone! ”

Celia said with a pout.

“Then, I too will be fine.”

Saying that, Rio made a wide smile.

“...Why? ”

Had Rio made a friend in the place that she didn’t know.--Celia thought.

But Rio’s answer was unexpected for Celia.

“I have Celia-sensei after all.”

Rio said that unabashedly. For a moment Celia was open-mouthed.

“Eh, ah, that...”

She instantly became embarrassed and looked down with a bright red face.

“...Ah, yo, you are making fun of me, right? You are treating me like a child! ”



Before long she was unable to endure the silence and said such a thing.

“No way, isn’t sensei older than me? ”

“That’s right, but no matter what it feels like you are treating me like a kid! Because, that’s, you are thinking of me as your friend right?”

“Yes. Is that no good? ”

Rio asked that and stared intently at Celia.

But Celia was unable to stare at Rio’s face directly.

“Uu...”

“Aah, of course I’m also thinking of sensei as my teacher. If sensei says that you don’t like it, I too will rethink about our distance with each other for a bit though...”

Then, a hoarse voice came from Celia’s mouth.

“...I don’t”

“Eh? ”

“I don’t...dislike it.”

This time he could hear clearly. But, it made Rio want to act slightly mischievously.

“Please say that one more time. ”

“Uu...”

Celia’s face was bright red. Rio was peering at her face.

“Sensei? ”

“I, I said that I don’t dislike it! Rio you meanie! Guess it from the atmosphere, geez! ”

It seemed her embarrassment had reached the limit. Celia clamored with her cheeks blushing.

“I’m sorry. I wanted to hear it clearly, so I unconsciously..”

Rio chuckled in amusement and apologized.

“Hmph.”

Celia glared at Rio with reproachful eyes before looking aside.

“When I’m troubled with an interpersonal relationship, please allow me to consult with sensei, both as a teacher and also a friend.”

“Tha, that’s fine. I’ll lend Rio my chest when you are crying because you get bullied.”

When Rio asked that, Celia glanced briefly at him and replied.

“Celia-sensei is tiny so it looks like that position will be just right for hugging.”

“Do, don’t call me tiny! I’m still in my growth period! ”

Celia’s face went red and she objected.

Rio was smiling in amusement again.

Eventually, Celia was also smiling together with him.

It was unchanging every day, but Rio thought that it was fulfilling somehow.

It was inadvertently an irreplaceable ordinary day. That was something that Rio had lost a long time ago.

The desire for revenge that was silently blazing inside his heart was still there, but he felt his heart lightening slightly when he was laughing like this.

Perhaps because of that, Rio thought so that this kind of ordinary day would continue no matter what. Even though he knew that it

wouldn't continue forever, it would be great if it continued as long as possible.

In contrast with such feelings though, the days in the academy passed by in the blink of an eye.

As expected, the exam this time around became the impetus that strengthened the oppression from the students of the academy toward Rio right away. And then, various incidents were happening.

It was judged that although Rio could handle sorcery, he couldn't learn magic at all and was made fun of.

When he went up to the next grade, he received a confession from a noble young lady. When he rejected her, a malicious rumor was spread about him.

He was receiving malicious bullying that was incomparable from before.

But Rio continued to advance forward.

There was no leeway for him to stop still.

No, he was vaguely afraid of stopping still. He didn't understand if he was really advancing forward, but he would feel at ease if he was doing something.

Although he was harboring such vague uneasiness that he couldn't explain, it was only his tea parties with Celia that could make Rio smile from the bottom of his heart.

That was why he could feel that time was passing by both slowly and also quickly.

Like that, days and months passed by for five years--.

# Chapter 5

Rio had turned twelve and advanced to the sixth year of Beltram Royal Academy's elementary school.

After becoming a student of the upper years, excluding some compulsory subjects, the majority of the subjects became optional. Students had to acquire the necessary credits by completing the optional subjects to graduate.

Something happened during the sword art class that Rio selected.

The upper year students were gathering in the academy's practice ground.

"Now then, there is something that I must tell all of you before starting the practice today. The match that is typically held against the Knights of the country every year will also be held this year."

The students became noisy in reaction to the instructor's statement.

The match between the students of the academy and the knights of the country was a type of festival event.

Spectators from outside the academy would also be invited. A match would be held grandly between participants that were selected from among the students who were learning sword art in the academy against the elite of the elites of the military which were the knights of the kingdom.

Because the knights that would be selected to participate in the event were renowned elites, it would seem like the students had no chance of victory when fighting normally, but the knights wouldn't fight that seriously, and every year moderately good fights would be displayed.

The point was to give some dignity to the students by clashing swords against the elites of the military and accumulate experience.

It was considered to be an incredibly great honor to participate in the match as a student representative. Sometimes students who performed in the match and displayed good potential would also be recruited by a knight's order in advance for when they graduated.

"The participants who shall represent the elementary school will be selected from this class. I will call their names now. Those who are called should respond and step forward. First is from the sixth year. Alphonse Rodin, Damian Basque, Jean Aaron--"

The instructor called the names indifferently. The students whose names were called would raise a cheer.

On the other hand, Rio was making a face as though it wasn't his business. But, "And then Rio."

When he noticed that his name was called, Rio's eyes turned round in surprise.

The surrounding students were also shaken immediately.

"From fifth year, Stead Huguenot. That's all."

Ignoring the students' agitation, the instructor tried to conclude the talk. However, "Please wait! I cannot accept this! "

A voice interrupted. The voice's owner was Alphonse Rodin.

"Why Alphonse? Are you dissatisfied in being chosen as a representative of the class? "

The instructor looked at Alphonse and asked.

"That's not the case! What I cannot accept is that this lowborn is chosen as a class's representative. It will become an embarrassment if this guy is participating in the match against the Knights as a class's representative. He is a dunce who cannot even use magic you know? "

Alphonse lined up words of contempt.

“The standard of the selection doesn’t include talent in magic. This is the result from a selection that took the skill in sword with serious consideration.”

“Skill in sword? Are you saying that lowborn is talented with the sword? ”

Alphonse asked with an obvious sneer on his face.

“That’s right.”

The instructor nodded without hesitation.

Then, not just Alphonse, the other students also scowled in dissatisfaction.

“...That is hard to believe. That guy is a mediocre person without any point of note.”

“That’s not for you to decide. This has already been decided. I won’t accept any objections.”

“...Understood.”

After the instructor spoke bluntly, Alphonse nodded with a sullen expression.

The instructor’s order was absolute in the martial arts class, including sword art. The objective was to teach the rule of the military where rank meant everything.

Rio also wanted to protest against his selection to be the academy’s representative in the match, but he shut his mouth because of such circumstances.

“Now we will begin training. First is a five-kilometer march while carrying a weapon. Go! ”

When the instructor ordered, that day’s class started.

“I heard. They said you will come out in the match against the kingdom’s knights?”

After school on a particular day. Celia was broaching the topic happily at their tea party in her laboratory.

“Yes, somehow I was chosen.”

Rio replied without sounding really motivated.

“Show a bit of motivation now that you were chosen. If you leave behind some results in the match, then you might get scouted by a knight’s order even before graduation.”

“Well, I don’t intend to become a knight after all.”

Rio responded with a wry smile.

“Is that so? It’s said that being a knight is exhausting work, but you will be granted knight peerage. I think it won’t be a bad choice if you are looking for position and a stable income.”

“I have no interest in those kind of things. I have something I want to do when I graduate.”

Saying that, Rio put the tea into his mouth with a graceful gesture. His form looked so good that even Celia was unconsciously impressed.

“Hee, is that so...”

Celia casually replied with a deep interest. She was worried whether it was something that she should pursue deeper, but then she made up her mind and tried asking Rio.

“You will graduate in less than a year. What do you want to do after graduating?”

“I’m thinking that perhaps I will go travelling in the not so far

away future. There is also a place that I've wanted to go to all this time."

"Eh, you will leave this country? "

Celia was shocked by Rio's answer. She never imagined that he would leave this country.

"Well, it's hard for me to be in this country after all."

"That, might be so but..."

If he became a knight, wouldn't those problems get much improved? Besides--,

"...Hey, won't you work in my lab? I'm already no good in various things if Rio isn't here though."

Celia said while looking across the lab.

Five years had passed since Celia encountered Rio.

At first, the messy state of Celia's lab was intolerable for Rio. After he started visiting this lab more often, Rio proposed that he would voluntarily tidy up the room.

As a result, Celia would realize in amazement the height of Rio's skill in everyday life.

Currently, it was just the tidying up of the room, but she was also receiving simple assistance with her everyday necessities and even with a part of her research. For Celia, Rio had become an existence that was like her irreplaceable partner.

"Celia-sensei too has reached a suitable age as a noble, so you have also received talks of marriage right? If despite that a commoner male with an unknown background is in your lab, it won't be something good."

"At present I have no interest in marrying. My home is annoying about it, but I'm rejecting all the marriage proposals by hiding behind



my research.”

Hearing the word marriage, Celia spoke in dejection. Rio chuckled seeing her like that.

“Well, I think it’s Celia-sensei’s freedom to decide when to marry but...”

“Aa! You are thinking that I will become too late in marriage right!?”

“That’s not true.”

The appropriate age of marriage for noble women who were living in this world was from the middle of their teens until twenty years old.

Currently, Celia was 17 years old. For Rio who still had the senses of a Japanese native remaining in him, it felt like that age was too early for marriage, but for Celia, she had entered the appropriate age for marriage as a noble.

Although if it was a woman who possessed a brilliant talent like Celia or a woman with high-class status, it wouldn’t be that difficult for them to search for a marriage partner even if their age crossed twenty.

“Hmph. Just why is this? The conception of the males of this country is that if a woman crosses twenty years old, it’s too late for them to marry.... Is a young girl that much better, huh? ”

Celia muttered complainingly. It seemed that she was really bothered by the topic of marriageable age.

“Well, in my personal opinion, I think the marriageable age of a noblewoman is too fast though. Celia-sensei’s appearance is youthful and cute, so it will be fine.”

“...That, are you saying that my appearance is childish? ”

Celia was originally short, and her body style was childish, because of that her external appearance looked like she was still in her early

teens. Her body hadn't grown since she first met Rio.

It seemed she was also slightly bothered about that.

“Sensei is a mature woman you know?”

Rio smiled gently while saying that. Celia's face flared up red.

“Ge, geez, idiot. Don't make fun of me...”

Rio looked smilingly at the red face Celia while noticing that the teapot had become empty. He started the preparation to brew a new pot. He had come to understand Celia's preference.

From his long acquaintance with Celia who was finicky about her tea, Rio had obtained self-confidence that he was able to make tea at the level of a butler.

Surely his tea would be able to satisfy noble ladies anywhere.

*Now then, what kind of tea I should brew next?)--when Rio was thinking that, “By, by the way, where is the place that Rio wants to try to visit?”*

Celia asked such a thing, perhaps in order to cover up her embarrassment.

“My parents' birthplace--the Yagumo region.”

“...Eh? Yagumo region? If I remember correctly...it's the place that seems to be beyond the undeveloped area right?”

Celia opened her eyes wide in surprise after hearing the answer that Rio gave her.

“Yes, it should be there.”

“I only know a little from my light reading of some books but it's a place where we don't have proper diplomatic relations with, you know? It's far away, there is no path there, and there is also no map. There are dangerous creatures, and if you are going there you will risk

your life for real you know? ”

Celia implicitly asked whether he was really planning to go there. That was just how remote the Yagumo region was from the viewpoint of the people in the Strahl region.

There was vast land spreading out at the east of the Strahl region that was called the undeveloped area. It was a blank zone where the rule of the human race didn't reach, but the Yagumo region existed even further beyond that place.

It was extremely rare for an ambassador or exploration party to be sent toward the Yagumo region that was beyond the undeveloped area, but the majority of the cases were that the party gave up halfway and returned. The number of expedition parties that could confirm the existence of the Yagumo region and return could be counted with one hand historically. It was a place that was thought to be somewhere no sane human would go to.

“Well, this is still a plan. Of course, I will go there after I make enough preparations. Even my parents arrived here, so it shouldn't be impossible.”

Rio spoke in a calm tone.

“Looks like, you aren't joking, but even so, Yagumo region...is it.”

Perhaps because it was a talk that would still be far in the future, or perhaps because it was a place that wasn't really comprehensible, Celia didn't really feel any sense of reality from it.

Besides, perhaps somewhere in her heart, she was taking it lightly, thinking that even Rio would surely give up when he realized just how severe such a trip was, that Rio's will to go there wouldn't be that strong.

That was because Celia didn't know Rio's motive for going to the Yagumo region--his past.

The day for when the matches were to be held arrived.

“Oi, Rio, don’t you dare display a pathetic match. If you show a pathetic match, our evaluation will also get lowered. That will be a bother.”

“Exactly. Why were you picked as a participant even though you’re weak? Although the instructor’s order is absolute, this is something that is hard to understand.”

Voices of scorn flew around the inside of the waiting room where the students who were going to participate in the match gathered.

The sixth-year Alphonse Rodin and the fifth year Stead Huguenot were the ones taking the initiative to hurl abuse at Rio.

The two of them were children of great nobles who represented the country. Their influence inside the academy was significant. It was troublesome because the two of them were taking the initiative to make trouble for Rio.

Rio had gotten ahold of the worldly wisdom to face this kind of trouble, however. He had also learned more than enough skill to ward off the scorn from nobles in these several years since he enrolled into the academy.

“I greatly understand that this is an important role that is too much for this one. I will fight hard in order not to display an unsightly match that will throw mud in everyone’s face, so please be merciful.”

“Hmph, we don’t have any expectations for you from the start, but don’t think that you will get off scot-free when you show an unsightly match that crushes our honor. That’s all.”

“Of course.”

Rio accepted Alphonse’s provocative words as though it was just a passing wind.

Then, the door of the waiting room was opened.

“It’s time. Come, Rio.”

Rio stood up and put his hand on his chest and replied in a courteous manner.

The match would have a total of five matches starting from the opening match, second match, middle match, second in command match, and final match. It was decided that Rio would come out in the opening match.

The spectator seats of the arena that was used as the match venue were filled with a great number of students and external audiences. They were turning their gazes to the center of the field.

There, Rio faced the knight who was to be his opponent, and a conversation before the start of the first match was unfolding.

When the opposing knight saw Rio’s face, he opened his eyes wide in shock before his expression immediately turned into annoyance.

“Hmph, I knew that you had enrolled in the academy, but to think that it will be you who becomes my opponent.”

“Long time no see.”

Rio too was similarly surprised seeing his opponent’s face, but he greeted him with a calm voice.

“Hou, so you remember me. It has been five years since our first meeting though.”

“Yes, at that time I was greatly in your care, Master Charles.”

The knight’s name was Charles Arbeau. He was the man who forcefully carried out an interrogation using torture on Rio five years earlier.

“Pardon me. At that time I was just doing my duty when doing that rough interrogation.”

Charles looked down on Rio with a sadistic smile.

“No, you don’t need to worry. I remember that at that time Master Charles was terribly upset about something, but it seemed I was unable to be really of use to you, so I apologize.”

After saying that, Rio made a smile that wasn’t filled with emotion.

At that time, Charles was unable to recover his honor that was lost because of Flora’s kidnapping incident and in the end, received a harsh punishment of demotion. He had recovered his status slightly in these five years, even so, it was incomparable with that time when he was considered to be the next captain of the royal guard.

Regarding this, no cause would justify him for hating Rio, but based on the situation of that time it wouldn’t be strange even if Charles were harboring an unjustified resentment toward Rio.

As expected, Charles’s eyes narrowed quietly and he sent a harsh gaze to Rio. It seemed he was displeased by Rio’s statement that could be heard as sharp sarcasm.

“...Let’s have a nice match today. Take care of me.”

Charles said with a cold voice. He didn’t do anything like asking for a handshake.

“Me too. Allow me to fight with my all today.”

“I accept the challenge. There is no need to be fearful of my title as a knight who belongs to the royal guards. After all, hesitating in real battle will directly lead to death.”

Charles made a chilly smile and lectured.

“Yes, I will do just that.”

Rio replied with a voice so calm it sounded fearless. The expression disappeared from Charles’s face.

“Then, the battle will start after this. Both sides, please draw out

your training swords.”

When the referee standing between them said that, Rio and Charles drew out the sword at their waist. Charles was using a one-handed sword and shield together in contrast to Rio who was only using a single sword.

“A bastard sword huh. That’s really fitting for you.”

Charles spoke with a provocative smile.

Bastard swords could be used with a one-handed grip or two-handed grip, but on the other side, it was a sword that was hard to handle and often disliked. Because Rio didn’t use a shield, he deliberately used this sword.

“The rule is just as explained before. The use of magic is forbidden, so please fight with only pure sword skill.”

“Understood.” “I know.”

After confirming the nod from Rio and Charles, the referee swung his left hand.

“Both sides take distance from each other and take your stance.”

After taking around ten-meter distance, Rio and Charles readied their sword.

“Then...begin! ”

The referee gave the starting signal and swung down his hand.

“HAAAH! ”

Charles closed the distance to Rio at full speed at the same time as the start of the battle.

*He doesn’t have the slightest intention of going easy on me huh. Bring it on.*

Rio sensed Charles's spirit and made a chilly smile.

Rio wasn't a saint. He was feeling anger just like everyone else would toward the unreasonable violence that he received from Charles in the past. He would forgive and forget if he received even a single apology, but he lost any mood for that from their conversation before this.

In the beginning, this was a match that he wasn't really motivated about, but if he was going to do it anyway, he decided that he would make his opponent shamed. At that time, Charles had completely closed the distance with Rio.

In contrast, Rio hadn't taken even a single step since the start of the match. Seen from the side, it only looked like Rio was pressured by Charles who was a knight, and he was late in reacting.

Charles seemed to also think so. He put on a triumphant smile. As expected, it appeared he didn't seem to have the slightest intention of going easy. Charles unleashed a full power horizontal swing toward Rio's torso. Even if magic could heal a wound, the power of the attack wouldn't let the target off with just pain if it hit.

Rio made a small sigh as he saw through the attack and took half a step back to evade Charles's sword in a hair's breadth.

In an instant, Rio detected the opening at Charles's right side. He stepped forward to his left and thrust his sword.

“Tsu! ”

The color of shock surfaced on Charles's face. He corrected his sword's swing to intercept the attack with his returning sword.

But the tip of the sword that was gripped by Rio's left hand caught Charles's neck first. Although it was a training sword that possessed no edge, the sword would dig into Charles's skin if it was moved by just a few millimeters more.

It was a situation where their motion was stopped entirely through that counter.



The arena fell deadly silent. The unexpected match result dumbfounded everyone.

“Tha, that’s enough! Winner, academy representative Rio! ”

The referee declared the victory with a shrill voice. But,

“Wa, wait! I was only careless just now! I’ll go all out next! ”

It seemed Charles was unable to accept his defeat that was settled so quickly. He spoke in protest with a flustered look.

Losing against a student who wasn’t of age and then demanding a rematch. It seemed Charles received a shock so great that he couldn’t even make a proper judgment.

From the viewpoint of the watchers, this must have looked like a humiliating defeat. But if Charles took a stance as though he was intentionally letting Rio win, he should be able to get off from this with little damage.

“Oi, something is wrong. This isn’t possible! ”

“N, no, a loss is a loss so...”

The referee made a troubled face toward the protest of Charles who lost his composure. Then, “You idiot! A loss is a loss. If you are a royal guard with honor, accept your loss honestly.”

A person entered the field and scolded Charles.

“A, Alfred.... No, Captain Aimard.”

Seeing the owner of the voice, Charles made an expression as though he was eating a sour grape.

Alfred Aimard. The man who ascended to the seat of the captain of the royal guard that initially should’ve been succeeded by Charles around this time using his connection. He was Charles’s superior. By the way, he was also Vanessa’s big brother.

“Although you were too conceited, you seriously went for the win and got the table turned on you instead, it’s pathetic. If you can see the audiences’ gaze, accept your loss like a gentleman and leave from here right away.”

Alfred talked with a cold voice.

Charles gasped and looked around him, and then his face immediately turned red. It seemed he had cooled down slightly. Embarrassment must be flooding him all at once.

“I, it’s my loss.”

Charles recognized his loss with a shrill voice and lowered his head.

“Thank you very much.”

Rio too returned a bow. After confirming that, Charles immediately turned around and left the field with hurried steps.

Even after that the matches moved forward without any more incidents and reached the end safely.



In the end, it was only Rio alone who obtained a victory against a knight as an opponent. There wasn't even a single knight after that first match who fought to give guidance to the student who hadn't been of age or purposefully losing.

If it were the year before, the win and loss ratio between students and knights would be around half and half. Perhaps the unsightliness that Charles exposed influenced this result.

And then, as the only one who had the result of a win against a knight, Rio gathered attention on him whether he liked it or not.

In the Duke Arbeau's mansion that was located in the royal capital Beltrant.

Charles was drinking alcohol in his room while consulting a single man.

„Shit-, those irritating underlings of Huguenot. Making fun of me!

Charles gulped down his alcohol and cursed. His mood was bad because he exposed a humiliating attitude in the match today. His face was already red from drunkenness.

“Fufu, please don't be angry and settle down.”

The man who was around thirty years old, sitting in front of Charles, spoke with a composed faint smile.

“...Reis-dono. No, pardon me. I'm showing you my unsightly side.”

Saying that, Charles's face contorted in shame.

“I know how you are feeling. After all, it is normal to graciously let a student have a win in that kind of match. It's offensive that the surrounding are saying whatever they please regardless of that.”

“Yes, exactly! Not being fixated on winning or losing in that kind of side entertainment is also a virtue. And yet, the indecisive nobles are sucking up to Huguenot, even though they don’t even understand anything about sword art, they are impudently...”

Charles was speaking talkatively after Reis presented him with a topic to latch on.

“All of that because they are jealous of Master Charles’s talent. It’s fine to let them say whatever they want. Right now is the time to be patient.”

Charles’s conceit seemed to be tickled by those words. His face loosened slightly.

“However, right now Duke Huguenot is riding the waves. Even his majesty cannot ignore that guy’s opinion.”

Charles turned a probing gaze at Reis.

“Yes. It’s also not likeable for my country that Duke Huguenot is picking up momentum like this. His talent must been splendid in order to have been able to build up to his current authority in these five years. But, there should be an opening that could be taken advantage of.”

“Five years, huh...”

Charles seemed to hold unpleasant thoughts toward those years and months. His face scowled unpleasantly.

“Come to think of it, the incident five years ago was the impetus that enabled Duke Huguenot to wield authority. Wasn’t it a case that was deeply affecting Master Charles too? ”

“Well, that’s so. Actually, the academy student who I faced today was also the person who was suspected to be involved with the kidnapping of her highness the princess. At that time, I was the one interrogating him.”

“Hou, so that boy...”

A hint of curiosity surfaced in Reis's eyes.

“That brat was really impudent. No matter how much I beat him, he wouldn't open his mouth. There was suspicious points in his testimony and the situation at that time, so I thought he would spit out the truth if I strongly beat him but...”

“But, what happened? ”

“He was living and acting together with the thugs of the slum who were participating in that kidnapping. All of those thugs were killed, and yet it was only that boy alone who survived. He described the assassin of unknown background who killed the thugs, but in the end that assassin seemed to commit suicide.”

“I see. That's certainly suspicious.”

“In the end, the investigation was stopped because he was a benefactor of her highness the princess, but at that time, if only that little brat opened his mouth and told the truth.”

It seemed his irritation from that time returned and Charles's face was distorting further. He poured alcohol into the metal glass that had become empty and gulped it down.

“Then, for you that boy is a fated opponent.”

“Haha, if the match today was a real battle, I would have cut him down.”

Charles was getting big-hearted from his drunken state and he boasted in a good mood.

Reis put on a smile that was tinged with delight and,

“How gallant. Let's make Duke Huguenot taste defeat too with that spirit.”

After saying he toasted with Charles.

The next day after the matches.

After school, Celia was preparing her treasured tea leaves and snacks to celebrate Rio's victory. On her way toward her laboratory from the middle school building where she had just given class, she found Rio and opened her mouth to call him.

“Ah, Ri...o...”

But, she noticed that Rio was walking with a female student, and she reflexively shut her mouth.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Rio's evaluation inside the academy was the worst. That was why it was something rare for Rio to do something together with another student. At that kind of time, it was usually him getting dragged into a quarrel. Much less when the other party was a female student, then it would be all the truer.

Celia's thoughts were halted for a few moments after encountering this unexpected scene. Even during that time, Rio was walking together with that female student to somewhere.

It seemed they were moving to a place where there weren't any other people.

*Wha, what to do.... Is he getting dragged into something strange again?*

Celia was looking around her restlessly. After confirming that there was nobody else than her, she secretly followed behind the two.

And then, the place changed to behind the tower that had the library in it. After arriving at a place where people rarely came, Rio and the female student stopped walking and faced each other.

“Tha, that's! Ple, please read this! ”

The female student suddenly took out a letter and presented it to

Rio stiffly.

“...Yes. It’s no problem. What could this be? ”

“The, the match yesterday, it was really amazing.”

Rio asked for the content of the letter. The female student spoke quickly with blushing cheeks.

“Ah, yes. Thank you very much.”

In the end, it was still unclear what kind of letter it was. Rio expressed his thanks with a slightly taken aback look.

“I, I wrote the rest in the letter so, later! ”

The female student couldn’t endure the atmosphere of the place and hurriedly left without waiting for Rio’s reply.

“Eh? Ah, wa, wait! ”

Rio hurriedly called her to stop, but the girl didn’t stop.

“Good grief...”

Rio muttered with a troubled look. The envelope in his hand felt abnormally heavy.

As expected from the situation the content must be a love letter. He wondered if he really had to read it and write a reply. His feelings were getting slightly heavy while harboring the premonition of a troublesome matter.

“Err, that, Rio...”

Then, at that time, Celia appeared out of nowhere and called out to Rio.

“Sensei..., could it be you saw? ”

“A, ahaha. I thought it wasn’t good doing that, but thinking that perhaps you were getting dragged into something troublesome



again.... So, sorry! ”

Celia acknowledged the fact awkwardly and deeply bowed her head while apologizing.

Perhaps she wouldn't be found out if she nonchalantly left the place without showing herself, and yet she felt guilty for peeking and showed herself. Rio made a small wry smile.

“Please lift your head. Sensei was worried about me right? ”

Celia timidly lifted her head hearing Rio's words.

“Ye, yes. Also..., actually I'm thinking to celebrate Rio's victory in your match...”

“...Eh? Such a thing, sensei doesn't need to do so much.”

Celia spoke hesitantly. Rio's eyes widened slightly and he acted reservedly.

“Tha, that's no good. After all even just participating in the match is already an honor. Normally it's a matter of celebration, Rio has to get a proper celebration too. Especially when you also won. Come on!”

After saying that, Celia got caught up in the momentum and grabbed Rio's hand and began walking with a fast pace.

“Ah, sensei, wait.”

Rio too also got led away by the pull and began to walk. His hand was still grabbed.

Celia's walking pace was faster than usual. He felt like she was acting a bit strange. Somehow her hand also felt sweaty--, he wondered if she was nervous.

Silence descended for a while. Rio was staring dubiously at Celia's face from diagonally behind her.

Then, he noticed that Celia's cheeks were reddening slightly.

"Sensei, could it be you caught fever? "

Rio asked considerately.

"Eh? The, there isn't anything like that though, why? "

"No, it feels like your face is somewhat red. Your hand is also a bit warm."

Rio said that and gently tightened his grip on Celia's hand.

"Ah, err, sorry! You dislike this, don't you? "

Celia let go of his hand in hurry.

"That's not true. But, I just don't want sensei to force yourself."

Rio's eyes slightly widened. Then he smiled softly and shook his head.

"Ye, yes. Thank you. But I'm really alright."

"If your condition is bad, it's better to take care of yourself more you know? "

"I, I'm fine! Look, let's go."

Celia walked with a brisk pace.

Her pace was faster than ever before, and her face was reddening even more.



After that, the two of them arrived at Celia's lab without any problem.

Rio began to prepare the tea with a practiced motion. A simple kitchen was created in Celia's lab, and tea utensils were placed there so that they could drink tea anytime.

"Then I'll brew the tea sensei prepared for today."

"Yes, it's tea leaves that were produced from Amour you know? "

"Sensei has prepared tea of outstanding quality here."

Amour was famous as a production area of tea leaves. The tea leaves from there were ranked as top quality products.

"Obviously. After all, this is to congratulate Rio's victory in the match. I've also prepared some cookies that suit the tea, so enjoy! "

Celia spoke with a lively voice. It seemed she had recovered her usual mood.

Rio's face broke into a smile. Without pause he continued his work quietly for a while. He put the teapot that was filled with tea and warm cups on a tray and brought it to the table. Then he sat down on the chair that was placed in the center of the room. Celia opened her mouth when Rio took a breather like that.

"Good work, thank you for doing this every time."

"No, more importantly--"

Rio stared intently at Celia's face.

"Wha, what? "

After staring at each other for a few seconds, Celia asked with slightly shrill voice.

"It looks like sensei's complexion has gotten better."

“...Eh? A, aa, yeah. That might be so.”

Celia's face became flabbergasted for a moment, but then she began to pat her cheeks with both hands.

“Be, before this was really nothing at all. I myself don't really get it, or like I have something on my mind, so don't mind it.”

Celia denied with flustered gestures and hand movements.

“Haa..., then that's good.”

Rio tilted his head and stared at Celia.

“Rather than something like that, the girl before this. Could it be she was confessing to you? ”

“It, seems so. More or less. She handed me a letter but...”

Rio answered looking strangely embarrassed at the topic that was suddenly brought up.

“Isn't that great? This means that no matter what the surrounding is saying, there is also a girl who is looking at Rio properly. First, you should start from being friends with her I think? ”

Celia glanced to observe Rio's reaction while asking. In contrast with her words, it felt like there was a dull prickling pain stabbing her chest. But, “No, I think it's better to not make that kind of relationship.”

“E, eeh? Why? ”

Celia was taken aback by Rio's reaction that was just too light.

“If someone like me gets close with her, she might also become a target of ostracism from the others.”

Rio smiled wryly while taking the teapot into his hand and pouring the contents into a cup. The tea that was ordinarily poured emitted steam from the cup. A rich fragrance was filling the room and tickling

the nose.

“Please.”

“...Thank you.”

Celia said her thanks and quietly put the tea into her mouth. After that, she talked further.

“But even so, that girl wants to become closer with Rio doesn’t she? Isn’t that why she wrote the letter? ”

“It’s impossible, the surrounding won’t allow that.”

Celia asked with a serious gaze. Rio smiled with a troubled look at that.

Rio’s judgment was calm and realistic till the end. Celia’s face turned worried.

“I, guess.... But, still. Aren’t you interested? Rio too is at that age. You must want to get closer to a girl or something. And there are a lot of cute girls inside the academy.”

“I’m not good with that kind of thing, or rather, I have no interest.”

Rio smiled wryly and shook his head left and right without hesitation.

From his attitude, Celia also discerned that he wasn’t interested. Although, interest in the opposite sex shouldn’t be something that could be ignored that easily by someone at Rio’s age.

Similarly, even Celia had a maidenly delusion toward romance as much as anyone else. And yet, it looked like the man in front of her eyes had calmly chopped off such things.

Celia was wondering in puzzlement how could such thing happen.

Was he just a quiet unsociable person? Or perhaps he already had someone he loved. Maybe that was why he wouldn’t even give notice

to any other girl?

*Does Rio have a girl he likes?) --suddenly Celia was thinking such thing.*

But she didn't have any idea of anybody that could be like that.

After all, Rio didn't even have a friend inside the academy.

*His only talking partner is me.*

Yes. Rio had no proper talking partner other than Celia. Celia who was devoting herself to her research was also the same though, but she was blind to her own shortcomings.

Rio would be in the library when he wasn't taking a class, eating, or sleeping, or else he would be doing voluntary sword practice outside. Anyway, Rio was always alone whenever she caught sight of him.

There was no sign of a woman other than herself. That was why Celia couldn't imagine that Rio had someone that he liked. The possibility of the existence of a loved one was excluded.

Rio was the type of person who wouldn't assert himself, so it was hard to guess what he was thinking in his heart.

Was he insensitive toward the goodwill of other people, or had he become distrusting toward others because the surrounding overly hated him?

Either way, Celia thought that it was really sad.

Perhaps there was no reason for her to meddle, but in these five years, it was only Celia who knew that Rio had continued to work hard all this time.

That was why Celia wanted Rio to become happy.

Perhaps the reason she was strangely conscious of Rio since some time ago was because of some parental emotion. There was no doubt

that that was the case. Like that, Celia was feeling the strange disturbance in her chest while convincing herself. She drank her tea to calm her disturbed heart and took a deep breath.

“Come to think of it, soon it will be the season for outdoor practice. What kind of subject will be practiced this year? ”

Celia somehow shifted the topic.

The outdoor practice was an examination in the form of real practice to test the result of the military exercise that the students had accumulated in the academy.

Every year the practice subject and examination ground were different, but several teams would be formed with the sixth year, combined with the fifth year, as the main core. The rule where the exam was held as a team competition was a constant every year.

Outside the territory that was ruled by the human race, monsters and fierce creatures, and even bandits and the like, were running rampant, but because the participants were almost all royalty and nobility, safety management would be given the highest consideration.

Before the exam, an investigation would be done beforehand to decide which area would be chosen for the exam, as well as to confirm the safety. In that investigation, dangerous existences would be culled, and any knight's order that wasn't busy would also act as security for the area while the exam was in progress.

“It looks like it will be a bit of march in the mountain forests.”

“Uhee. Mountain forests huh. It's impossible for me. Even going from here to the school building is already troublesome.”

Celia fell limply on the desk as though to say that it was tedious even just imagining it.

“I think it would be better if Celia-sensei exercises a bit more.”

Rio said with a wry smile.



Celia almost never came out of her lab other than for class. Even if she was a noble young lady, it would be a problem as a human to be this lacking in exercise.

“Ahaha, well, I’ll do that when my research reaches a good checkpoint.”

Celia smiled bitterly and gave an evasive answer.

# Chapter 6

One day while the outdoor practice was approaching.

Rio was taking a class that could be picked by student in their fifth or sixth year elementary school.

The class's name was "General Theory of Sorcery"--, the teacher in charge of the class was Celia.

It was a subject that was kept at distance because it was a tortuous study on top of being not practical, but thanks to Celia taking charge of the class this year, the number of participants was unusually a lot.

Celia had become seventeen years old, but her look had stopped growing at the level of middle school student. Her appearance wasn't that different from the students. In addition, coupled with Celia's cute appearance that attracted attention and her friendly character, her popularity was extraordinarily high even among the teachers of the academy.

Therefore, the students who were inside the classroom right now--especially the male students--were there not because of their zealous desire for knowledge, many of them were choosing this class with the reason that Celia was the one teaching this class.

By the way, there were forty people inside the class right now including Rio, but among the female students there were Christina and Roana, and then Flora who was a year below them.

"Can I ask what is the definition of sorcery that everyone know? Let's see, Lady Christina. How about it?"

"Yes. Sorcery is a technique to control magic power and magic formula to cause various phenomenon."

Christina immediately expressed her opinion.

“Oo, I can hear amazing answer right from the start. As expected from her highness.”

“It’s my honor.”

Christina acted humbly with a calm face.

“Sorcery is given definition from various view points, but what Lady Christina spoke is the definition that is said to be the most generic. By the way, there is also definition that is focusing to the activation process of sorcery, but in the first place what kind of process that is activating sorcery? Stead.”

When Stead was named by Celia, he stood up vigorously.

“Yes. Sorcery is activated by pouring magic power into the magic formula.”

“Almost but not quiet. That answer deserves 80 point I think. What do you think is lacking from your answer?”

“...I don’t know.”

Stead was at a loss for words and his face contorted in vexation.

“Then, Rio. What about you?”

“In case the magic formula to control magic power isn’t included, there will be a need to control the poured magic power. In case the control failed, the sorcery won’t activate.”

“Correct. Full point.”

Celia made a satisfied smile at Rio’s smooth answer.

On the other hand, Stead’s expression was secretly turning grim.

“Then what is magic formula? Roana.”

“Yes. It’s said that magic formula is a formula to interfere with the

world.”

“Correct. As expected from you.”

“I’m honored.”

Roana smiled happily at Celia’s praise.

“Sorcery control the magic power inside our body, and it activate by the control of magic formula that is the formula for interfering with the world. It’s truly an act that is accomplished by god. Well, magic formula itself was created by the Six Wise Gods, so that statement is not really a mistake.”

The students inside the classroom were listening carefully to Celia’s story with rapt attention.

By the way, the matter of Six Wise Gods was something that even Rio knew. Six Wise Gods were deeply related with the development of history and culture in Strahl Region. The people of this region held religious faith toward the multiple gods who were called the Six Wise Gods.

Although, Rio who were born and raised as orphan had extremely thin faith toward the Six Wise Gods.

“I think all of you know already but, magic power control is also greatly related with magic formula contract for learning magic and the application of magic. It’s possible to somehow learn and use low level magic using intuition, but in order to learn and use magic with high difficulty, magic control ability with high level is indispensable.”

“Sensei!”

Stead raised his hand in order to ask a question to Celia who was giving explanation smoothly.

“What is it, Stead?”

“About how magic formula contract that is held in order to learn magic is influenced by magic power control, in other words, those

with immature magic power control cannot learn magic, is that right?"

Stead was looking at Rio with a mocking grin. Lured by that, the students around were also chuckling. Rio was ignoring them with a calm face.

"That's not true. Because there is also affinity depending on the person for the magic formula contract that is necessary in order to learn magic, no matter how skillful someone's control of their magic power, there will still be magic that they won't be able to learn."

Celia spoke with a slight frown.

Magic was a technique to take in magic formula into the body, and from there that sorcery could be activated optionally just by chanting the spell that was the sorcery's name in the magic formula that was taken in.

Magic formula contract was a necessary ceremony in order to take in magic formula into the body, the method was extremely simple. Using a special catalyst to draw magic formula for the contract on the ground, and then they would chant on top of that formula and performed control of magic power. If the contract succeeded, the magic formula would be taken into the body, and from then the person would be able to use sorcery only by chanting the spell without even drawing magic formula.

The amount of magic power was easy to inherit from parent to child. It was a fact that there was a great difference in strength between people who could use magic and people who couldn't. Therefore, it was easy for people who could use magic to be placed in the privileged class. The young royalty and nobility tended to think that magic was a special skill that could only be used by the chosen people.

And then, the reason was unknown but, although Rio was judged to possess the necessary magic power to learn magic, he failed all kind of magic formula contract and was unable to learn even a single magic. Rio invoked envy from many people because he could handle anything flawlessly and left behind excellent results, but since he was

judged to be unable to learn magic, the jeer he was receiving became focused to that point.

Rio who was unable to use magic was not a chosen person as expected, they said.

“I see. In other words, it’s only the chosen people who can learn magic. Thank you very much.”

Regardless of Celia’s denial of his own theory, Stead sat down in satisfaction.

“Then, I’ll resume the lesson. In the first place--”

Celia made a small sigh and resumed her lecture. After that the lecture progressed smoothly and the end of the class arrived in the blink of eye.

And then, after the class ended.

“As expected from Celia-sensei! The one who is said to be the genius who is going down in the history of the royal academy. I’m really moved by sensei’s deep knowledge!”

Stead walked toward Celia and told her his impression of the lecture with a deeply moved expression.

“Ahahah. Thank you.”

Celia said her thanks while smiling wryly.

On the other hand, Rio immediately tidied up his lesson materials and he was going to leave from the classroom, but.

“Ah, Rio--”

“Oi, commoner. Even though you cannot even use magic, why are someone lowly like you taking this class when your selling point is only your lip service and cheap trick?”

When Celia was going to call out to Rio who was leaving, Stead interrupted in displeasure. Rio stopped walking and turned around.

“It’s because although I cannot learn magic, but I can use sorcery.”

This kind of trouble was everyday occurrence. Rio was replying indifferently like usual.

“That’s not what I’m talking about. It might be dangerous for the ladies in this class when a despicable person like you is in this classroom.”

Stead revealed his indignation.

“I have not the slightest intention to perpetrate anything inappropriate...”

Rio shook his head with clear denial.

Position, lineage, honor, income. All of those were factors that would be pursued in the future by daughters of noble as marriage conditions. After all since their birth they had been given a duty to marry with partner that possessed even more excellence than them socially.

But, even if they were noble, when it came to a twelve year old maiden, it was also a fact that a lot of girls had their interest taken simply by the other party’s excellent look rather than those kind of practical requirements.

Rio still had trace of childishness in his look like a young boy, but year by year his natural androgynous appearance was getting polished. When they advanced to the upper grades of the elementary school, some female students were attracted to Rio’s look and tried to court him with the feeling of playing with fire, but every time Rio would ignore all of that kind of invitation. The girls would harbor unjustified resentment because of that and spread baseless rumor.

Recently that kind of rumor was dying down, but most likely Stead had completely swallowed the rumor at those days--Rio thought that, but.

“Don’t lie. Recently there is rumor that you are seducing a female student in my year.”

Stead was talking about something recent. A question mark floated above Rio’s head.

“Seducing, is it? I don’t recall anything like that, not at the slightest...”

Rio wondered that perhaps it was about the female student who handed him a letter the other day. But, he didn’t do anything like seducing at all. Rio shook his head in denial.

“Hmph, don’t get any misunderstanding just because you alone obtained victory at the match the other day against a knight as your opponent. That victory was just a fluke. It wasn’t because of your strength.”

Stead flared up at Rio who was warding off the accusation evasively.

In reality, recently in place that Rio didn’t know, especially among the girls of the lower grade, Rio’s evaluation was increasing slightly. The impetus was the match against the knight the other day.

“I too am heavily aware of that.”

“Then don’t get carried away. Especially in front of me. It’s an eyesore seeing a commoner getting cocky.”

“Indeed. Then, I will bear in mind to do everything I can to not be an eyesore in class that you are taking.”

Rio was thoroughly abasing himself, but Stead’s irritation wouldn’t settle down.

“Hmph, then don’t come into the class that I’m taking.”

When Stead said that, \*shin\*, the inside of the classroom fell silent.



“Stead, stop that.”

There, Celia cut in with a voice that was filled with anger. If Celia meddled carelessly, it might left a resentment from here on, but as expected this matter had reached a level that she couldn't overlook.

“Is sensei siding with this man?”

Stead made a sullen expression.

“You are a noble right? Criticizing someone without a definite proof isn't something that can be done. What you are doing right now only looks like a pointless harassment toward someone weaker.”

Celia remonstrated Stead accurately.

“But, it will be too late if something is done only after the damage is done. There is even a rumor that this guy is also making a pass at you.”

Stead doggedly opposed even now.

“There is no such thing like Rio making a pass on me. Even if Rio is actually such a man, as long as I'm alive as a teacher, I won't let anything indecent to happen in this class.”

Celia spoke decisively. Even Stead withdrew reluctantly against that pressure.

“...If that's what you are saying, then I have no choice.”

But, Stead glared at Rio and left behind a word of warning at the end.

“Remember this, commoner. If you do something, my house of Duke Huguenot will become your enemy.”

“I will remember it.”

After Rio replied so, he bowed to Celia and left from there.

The morning of the day of the outdoor practice.

In a mountain forest area that was two hours away at the northeast from the royal capital Beltrand using the flying transport method that was called magic ship, students wearing the uniform of Beltranm Royal Academy were gathering.

“Then, I will inform all of you regarding the subject of the practice.”

The member of a team would be ten people in total. The team Rio belonged to was doing a briefing before the practice.

The team captain who became the commander was Alphonse Rodin. Other than Rio and Alphonse, Christina, Roana, Flora, and Stead were also team members.

“The script of the practice is assuming that there is a situation where enemy country is invading. Our squad that is an elite team that had held back a large enemy force has to cut through this forest mountain in order to retreat from the battlefield. Thus, swiftness and stealthy are required in order to shake off enemy pursuer too.”

Alphonse was explaining while spreading open a map at hand.

“The mission period will be until sunset today. It will be a great reduction in our score if we cannot reach the goal until then. It goes without saying that the faster we arrive, the better it will be.”

The grade from this practice wouldn't influence their graduation itself, but if they obtained good grade here and graduated, it would be really advantageous when finding employment in the military.

“And so, ladies and gentlemen, we will reach the goal at afternoon.”

Alphonse spoke with an expression that was full of confidence.

“Wait a second. That might be possible if we go in a straight line,

but this is a forest mountain area. The traveling time will take twice than normal. It's impossible to reach the goal at afternoon."

Roana objected with a cloudy expression.

"It will be fine, Miss Roana. Because I have grasped the shortest route even including the old road."

Alphonse's smile didn't crumble and he answered confidently.

"...What's the meaning of that? The exam area was announced only yesterday."

Roana made a suspicious face. Then,

"A private soldier who served in my house is a former adventurer. It is by chance that he knows the area around here really well. There are several old roads that are effective shortcut and I have told them to Alphonse-senpai."

Stead who was listening to the talk quietly spoke with a proud look.

"That's why, it's not an exaggeration even if we say that information control everything in war. It's as though we have been promised to obtain good result in this practice."

Saying that, Alphonse made a pleased smile.

"I'm feeling reluctant instead because this feels like a sneaky method."

Roana's face still scowled till the end.

"I too think that it's problematic to be over trusting with an information that has no substantiation behind it."

Christina made her opinion known with a curt tone. Alphonse's expression clouded slightly at the direct opinion of a princess.

"Please don't worry about that. The information that I obtained is written in this map. And when I compared it with this map, the

reliability of this information is high.”

Stead answered reassuringly in exchange of Alphonse who was slightly faltering.

“...I think that the risk of encountering monster or fierce animal will increase if we enter an old road though. What do you think about that?”

Christina quietly narrowed her eyes and looked at Alphonse while asking that.

“This area’s safety has been confirmed beforehand. Besides, there is a necessity to escape from enemy’s tracking in this practice, so choosing to advance using an old road make sense.”

Alphonse answered timidly.

“I see, then it’s fine. You are the commander of this squad. I will leave it to you.”

Christina unexpectedly withdrew shortly. Even though she expressed her opinion, in the end she was thinking that the right to decide was in the hand of the commander.

“Please leave it to me. I promise to obtain the highest grade in our year without fail.”

Alphonse sighed in relieve and bowed reverently while declaring that.

After that, they carried out the last check regarding the formation and how to react when encountering monster.

“Oi, Rio. Feel honored. I prepared a job that even a hindrance like you who can’t use magic can do. Carry the baggage of our team.”

Saying that, Alphonse sent his gaze toward the baggage that was placed in a slight distance away.

Ahead of his gaze, an extra large backpack and shoulder back that

were filled with luggage to the brim were placed there. Most likely all the materials that would be necessary throughout this practice were put in them.

It was an amount that was too much for one person to carry, but it was pointless to object. Rio judged so and,

“Understood.”

He nodded without making any complaint.

He tried carrying the backpack on his back, but he felt that his body would soon reach the limit if he was only using his base physical capability. However, there wouldn't be any problem if he was using physical strengthening.

Rio secretly performed physical strengthening. The magic formula that should arise if it was magic didn't surface. Therefore, there was nobody who noticed Rio doing physical strengthening.

Then, a girl who called out to Rio appeared.

“E, err, are you alright? Isn't it heavy to carry that much luggage alone...”

It was Flora. She belonged to the year below Rio and her big sister Christina, but until now Rio had only talked with her once inside the academy.

One day after several days passed since Flora enrolled into the academy, Flora said her thanks to Rio regarding the kidnapping incident. Since then, Rio felt her gaze toward him several times, but she never called out to him until today.

That was why, it was really something unexpected that Flora called out to him. As expected even Rio slightly widened his eyes in surprise.

“That's, should I also carry a bit of them?”

Flora suggested to help when Rio was troubled of how to reply.

“No, I’m fine. Thank you very much for worrying about me.”

Rio instantly made a smile and gently refused Flora’s suggestion.

Surely she wasn’t a bad kid. Among the royalty and nobility of Beltram Kingdom that possessed strong discrimination, Flora possessed a character so gentle that it could be called unprecedented.

But, perhaps it was the adverse effect from her sheltered upbringing where she was really treasured, or perhaps it was her inherent nature that was too kind, she seemed to be a bit estranged regarding what kind of effect her act would cause to the surrounding.

In this situation, there was no option for Rio to accept Flora’s suggestion. If he did such thing, he would surely get criticized by the surrounding. In the first place this also wasn’t a weight that Flora could carry.

Rio only accepted her feeling thankfully. Then, there,

“Lady Flora, you mustn’t talk with such commoner. It will bring a bad influence if you get involved with such worthless existence.”

Alphonse appeared and interrupted by making fun of Rio.

“That’s right. As a barbarian strength is the only thing that he has in excess.”

Stead also cut in and made Flora to take distance from Rio.

Rio bowed briefly and left from there, waiting until the time to depart.

And then, presently they were marching on an old road that was stretching deep inside the forest.

No matter how far they walked, there were only thick bushes and plants entering their eyes.

Even though the time was still before noon, the place was gloomy with cool air that felt chilly to the skin drifting around. Sometimes, high-pitched cry of bird and beast reverberated from afar, causing Flora to jerk in surprise.

Even though the members of the team were wearing uniform and weapon, Rio was carrying weapon in addition of a backpack and shoulder bag. That burden was incomparable with the other members.

But, the students in the team advanced without paying attention to that. Sometimes Flora would walk at the very back of the line and looked back to Rio in worry, but she couldn't see any sign of fatigue in Rio's face.

"Flora, it's dangerous to look at other place. Please worry about your own stamina."

Christina warned the fidgety Flora. Although it was only for form's sake, they were in the middle of covert action, because of that her voice's volume was low in consideration of that.

"Bu, but, Big Sister. Something like this is strange. Why is it only that person that is treated like that?"

Flora spoke with a sad face. The unexpected reaction of her little sister who was timid and never really raised any objection caused Christina to widen her eyes slightly.

"That guy should be wearing an artifact that strengthen his physical ability right now."

"His magic power and also stamina won't hold if he is strengthening his physical ability continuously. If we don't take more rest or carry the luggage in turn..."

Christina's expression clouded at Flora who was worrying about Rio's burden.

"I told you already before enrolling into the academy not to get involved with that guy. Have you forgotten?"

“...I remember. That’s why, I have followed Big Sister's instruction all this time. But, I don’t understand why. Master Rio, he is always alone.”

“That’s right.”

Christina easily agreed.

“Tha, that’s right you say...”

Flora was taken by surprise. The expression of Roana who was listening to the conversation right beside them turned troubled.

“Even if we get carelessly involved with him inside the society that is the academy, it won’t be good for both our sides. He too shouldn’t be wishing for that.”

“Wha, what are you saying, there is no way such thing--”

“That’s how it is. Stop the pointless talk here. Right now the setting is that we are in the middle of retreating from battlefield. Besides--”

Christine cut in Flora’s remark. Then,

“Monster!”

Suddenly Alphonse yelled. Nervousness ran among the team members.

Monster--, they were anomalous creatures with the particulars of their ecosystem wrapped in mystery.

They possessed a certain degree of intelligence, but they were hostile toward every kind of living thing other than monster. When they died, they would leave behind a stone that was filled with magic power called magic stone, while their body would disappear leaving nothing behind. Those were their traits.

The male students other than Rio simultaneously drew out the sword on their waist and slightly lowered their waist in preparation. The female students vigilantly prepared their rod which was used by



magician.

They were in the middle of practice right now, but the battle that would begin after this wasn't practice. It was without a doubt a real battle. But, encountering monster in the middle of practice was also expected, so the students weren't in confusion.

"Everyone don't panic! It's goblin. Their number is also few. The four vanguard raise your physical ability with artifact, and then charge to rout the enemies."

After Alphonse ordered, the four boys who acted as vanguard chanted simultaneously.

Physical Ability Strengthening Magic  
"Enchant Physical Ability."

Then, the bracelet the students were wearing under their clothes shined, and the sorcery to increase the wearer's physical ability was activated. Geometrical magic formula floated up with the bracelets that were an artifact as the starting point, enveloping the body of the user students.

Artifact that was used with spell as the activation key was similar in mechanism with magic, but different from magic where the magic formula could be taken into the body as many as one liked as long as their body's affinity matched, magic formula that was sealed into artifact fundamentally was only one. There was the advantage that even people with bad affinity and couldn't succeed in the magic formula contract could use magic through artifact, but there was demerit that the magic could only be activated with an output that had been set up beforehand.

The four boys kicked on the ground as strong as they could and approached the group of monster with the form of small ugly person that was called goblin. And then, they routed the goblins in the blink of eye.

Goblin was an existence that was called the weakest even among the monsters. They weren't a match against the students who although were still twelve years old, but they had received genuine

combat training in the academy and had their physical ability strengthened with artifact.

The goblins left behind small magic stones as big as pebble and disappeared without a trace.

“They aren’t a big deal. There is nothing to be feared unless it’s against tougher monster.”

Stead’s mood turned better from the easy victory and he talked proudly.

“As expected from Stead. You are reliable. Compared to you, that commoner there is really useless.”

Alphonse praised Stead in good humor then turned his gaze toward Rio.

But, Rio was staring intently deep inside the forest. He didn’t seem to hear Alphonse’s words at all. Alphonse was unable to stomach that and,

“Oi, Rio! The battle is over. Don’t act absentminded! We’ll leave you behind!”

Alphonse yelled angrily.

“My apologizes.”

Rio replied and took off his gaze from the forest. After that they immediately resumed their movement.

And then, deep at the forest where Rio was staring at just now, a single man was hiding behind plants.

It was Reis. His whole body was covered with black robe and he was concealing his presence like the dead.

“That was close. To think that I’m almost noticed at this distance.... That’s an unbelievable boy.”

Reis muttered in admiration. Actually he wanted to get a bit closer, but he judged that it was better to not get closer than this.

“Perhaps it was really him who defeated my subordinate five years ago. The spy I inserted into the house of Duke Huguenot also seemed to have done his work nicely, perhaps I should ascertain his true strength while doing this work...”

Reis muttered in delight while putting an eerie smile like a demon on his lips.

The march was going smoothly even after that.

They only encountered goblin and there wasn't any danger that was really dangerous. The male students were competing in exterminating goblins in order to show their cool side as much as possible to the female students.

The information of the surrounding area that Stead provided was actually accurate. It looked like everything was going well that at this rate they might be able to really arrive at their destination in the afternoon.

However, in a place that they couldn't detect, something was waiting to come apart at the seams.

The exhaustion of the students were accumulating with certainty because they were walking around in an unfamiliar mountain forest area. Even the goblin extermination that they carried out with high spirit at the beginning was starting to feel like a clerical work that they were doing dispassionately before long.

But, Rio who originally should be the first one to be tired first kept making a nonchalant face no matter how much time passed, so the male students' sense of rivalry was blazing and they didn't try to make any complain no matter what.

“Goblin again huh. Don't you think their number are a lot since some time ago?”

“It must be just your feeling. So many of this creature exist that it’s said there will be thirty of them around if you catch sight of one of them.”

Like that, Stead and Alphonse were making an optimistic talk.

Then when around thirty minutes passed, it happened.

The trees blocking their view suddenly cleared up. Blue sky was spreading out as far as their eyes could see.

But, ahead of the area where the trees cleared out, there was an open space spreading out. Even more forest was spreading ahead of there. No, it was more accurate to express that the forest was spreading right below their sight.

Yes, Rio and others arrived at above a cliff. After they moved near the edge of the cliff in a dumbfounded state, they could see the forest spreading thirty meter below them. If they could descend until the bottom, it would only be a slight distance away until the goal point, but it was only a suicidal act to descend down without any lifeline.

“Oi, this, the information is wrong isn’t it...”

“Yeah, what to do now? If we go back through the path we came from, it will be a lot of time loss.”

Two male students muttered while glancing at Stead.

The team was moving based on the information that Stead provided. A thought that their fatigue until now might just be a wasted effort surfaced in their mind. The mood was becoming strangely subdued.

“You want to say something to me?”

Stead asked the students who were whispering to each other with an irritated voice.

“N, no. It’s nothing. Right?”“Yeah.”

The students shook their head in panic. These two were sixth year, but they couldn't openly say anything to the fifth year Stead. That was because their house couldn't go against Stead's house of Duke Huguenot.

Dissatisfied gaze naturally moved toward the commander Alphonse. Alphonse's house of Marquis Rodin was also quite a famous house, but it was inferior against Duke Huguenot.

"Wha, what's with those eyes? Say it clearly if you've got any complain."

Alphonse threatened the students who were looking at him. Then,

"Then, can I say something?"

Christina took the initiative to open her mouth.

"Wha, what could it be?"

Alphonse's expression stiffened at the entrance of the first princess.

"Which way we are heading next? The path is cut off here though."

Christina was seeking an answer for the problem with the highest priority at the present time. Because Alphonse completely thought that she would deliver complain to him, he was taken by surprise.

But, he soon rethought that perhaps it would be better to get criticized right at his face. After all Alphonse didn't have the slightest idea what he should do to deal with this unforeseen situation.

Or rather, he was only feeling like escaping from his responsibility and had no composure to think.

"About, that.... Err..."

"You are the commander of this squad. And it was you who overly trusted the uncertain information provided by Stead over there and formed a plan based on that, so you must have considered this kind of

situation right?”

Christina continued with a bland tone toward Alphonse who was at a loss.

“Sa, saying my information is uncertain...”

“I’m not asking a common soldier like you.”

Stead cut in from the side, but Christina cut him down without a thought.

“The words of the commander are absolute in military. Right now we are in training, but what we are doing the same thing like military. If you the commander says to advance, then we have no choice but to advance. I wish you will understand well that with a single command from you, the worst case might happen toward the squad.”

“Ye, yes.”

Alphonse nodded with a pale face. An unbearable silence was flowing among the team.

Then, it was at that time. A single spear that was made from shaved wood came flying from the forest behind them, piercing the torso of a male student.

“Eh...?”

The student who got his stomach stabbed by spear let out a bewildered voice.

“I, it’s orc! There are several others! Defense!”

Roana instantly discovered the enemy and notified the students.

Orc was a brutal monster that was incomparable from goblin. Its height surpassed two meters, its physical strength far surpassed human adult, and sometimes it would also act together with a goblin group.

“Va, vanguard! Ready the shield and block the spear. Rearguard, perform Heal on the injured!”

Alphonse immediately gave instruction.

But, the monsters’ additional attack approached faster than the student could start acting. Three spears came flying. One stabbed the ground, while the other one approached Rio.

Rio soundlessly drew out the bastard sword on his waist and instantly cut away the spear. On the other hand, the last one stabbed Stead’s torso.

“UWAAaaaa! Pull it out, pull it ooooouuut!”

Stead ranted with a loud voice in frenzy. He paid no attention to what others would think. And then, he leaped toward the nearby male students perhaps because of his derangement from the pain.

“Uwaa! Stop!” “O, oi, don’t come here!”

The students feared the uniform that was vividly dyed by blood and pushed Stead away. Without stopping Stead collided on Flora hard.

“Kya!”

Flora who was trying to treat the injured male student was sent flying and she fell just right nearby the edge of the cliff. The impact caused the ground of the cliff edge fragiley crumbled.

“Flora!”

Christina was concentrating at the monster before her, but she heard Flora’s scream from behind and looked back in panic. At that time, Flora was dragged by the crumbling ground of the cliff edge. She was showing a sacred expression from the terror of the sense of weightlessness of falling.

“Hih, he, lp...”

Flora immediately looked around to try to grab to something. Her gaze met Rio.

For a moment, Rio's expression contorted looking greatly troubled, but he tossed away his backpack and shoulder bag roughly and rushed right away.

Flora's body was already falling from the cliff and vanished from view.

'Hurry'--Rio was sprinting with a speed that was hard to believe with only that word in his mind. And then, he reached the cliff edge in the blink of an eye and without the slightest hesitation he dove from the cliff.

He stretched out his hand straight away. Rio firmly grabbed the hand of Flora that was reaching out to empty air. If Rio was only running a second later, surely he would not make it in time.

The gaze of Rio and Flora overlapped once more midair. Flora made an expression that was going to cry from relief. But, it was still too fast to feel relieved.

At this rate the two of them would experience a bungee jump without rope from a height of 30 meters together. However, Rio didn't allow that. After all if it was just Flora then she could still be saved.

"Sorry."

After muttering that, Rio pulled Flora's hand that he grabbed and drew her body closer to him. Without pause his body rotated like a spinning top.

"Kyah"

A cute scream could be heard. Instantly, Rio used the momentum of his body's rotation and fully used the arm strength that deviated from normal people, throwing Flora back on the cliff.

"Kyaa!"



Flora's body fell with a thud on the cliff.

*She will be fine in that position.*

Perhaps she got some scratch from just now, but he couldn't help that.

Thinking that, a smile emerged on Rio's lips with a sigh. But, his relieve was only for a brief moment. The compensation for saving Flora was attacking Rio even now.

Yes, Rio now was falling for thirty meter from the cliff.

Rio saved Flora and then fell to below the cliff. The team members who were seeing that were dumbfounded.

“-, right now the priority is to annihilate the monster! Alphonse!”

Roan came back to her senses early and stimulated Alphonse.

“De, defend! Male vanguards ready your shield and become a wall to protect Lady Christina and Lady Flora! Rearguards, lay out the barrage using attack magic. Roana, heal the wounded. Form rank!”

Alphonse gave the order and the formation was rebuilt.

The battle from there was a one-sided curbstomp. The vanguards used shield to become wall, the rearguards healed the wounded and used attack magic to kill the monsters.

That was obvious. The attack power of human that could use magic was in a different level.

Even the basic attack magic that children who attended the royal academy learned the very first had a power that was enough to seriously injure human. Even the students here possessed attack power that could one-sidedly suppress a group of goblins alone if they were fighting fair and square.

Therefore, in case sorcerer faced someone that couldn't use magic, the established tactic was to fight by maintaining distance of middle range and further. If the sorcerer could bring such situation, as long as the opponent didn't have mobility or defensive power that could completely block attack magic, the sorcerer wouldn't lose.

Lightning Bullet Magic

“Blitz Shot”

The lightning attack bullets that Christina fired shot through the body of the goblin that survived till the end. The monster left behind magic stone and then vanished without leaving any trace. The battle was over.

There were two wounded, but because Roana and Flora joined the treatment by Alphonse's command, their life weren't at risk.

The problem was how Flora almost fell from the cliff and now Rio's whereabouts was unknown. The students who had recovered their composure seemed to be conscious of that and an uneasy atmosphere flowed.

“That, why did Lady Flora fall from the cliff?”

Alphonse awkwardly asked in order to sort out the situation as the commander.

“When I was about to apply Heal to the wounded, someone suddenly collided on me from behind...”

Flora answered with confusion.

“Who was the one colliding on you?”

When Alphonse asked that, one of the female students timidly raised her hand and she began to talk hesitatingly.

“Err, her highness fell because Stead collided on her.... I was right beside Lady Flora at that time.”

The voice and countenance of the girl weren't good. She must be fearing Stead. Stead who just finished getting healed was glaring at

that student with a demonic look.

“Are you saying it was my fault? Even I was pushed away! I’m a victim here!”

Stead yelled with a vigor that believed what he was saying himself from the bottom of his heart without a doubt.

“Ah, no. I’m not saying that Stead was at the wrong or anything.”

The girl shrunk back when Stead glared at her.

“Then who are you saying is at fault?”

“Ah, no, that’s...it’s the person who pushed Stead?”

“That’s right! There was someone who pushed me at that time! That guy is the culprit!”

Stead tried to push the responsibility to other person. But,

“Isn’t now not the time to search for the culprit?”

Roana said with an expression that looked fed up by the development of the talk.

Stead looked at Roana with a sullen expression.

“The, then, what are you saying we should do?”

Alphonse asked Roana in panic.

“Should we go save him, or should we go out from this forest. Isn’t it one of the two?”

Roana asked with a displeased expression as though to say why he was asking something so obvious.

“De, deciding that with my own discretion is...”

“What are you saying..., a commander exist for this kind of time.”

Alphonse's statement that was unbecoming for a commander made Roana exasperated.

"I, I'm thinking of respecting the team's opinion. Everyone, what do you think?"

Alphonse asked for opinion from the team members.

"Is he even alive in the first place?"

"As expected he is beyond saving isn't it? It's this high. How are we going to go down there?"

"Well, yeah. The risk is too high to purposefully search for a commoner whose life and death is unclear at this situation."

And so on, negative opinions about Rio's rescue were flying around.

Then, a person who suddenly interrupted appeared.

"Everyone, you see, the person who pushed me. Actually it was that commoner."

It was Stead. He was making a face that looked strangely serious. The students' attention was gathered on him.

"At that time, that coward seemed to be scared by the battle's atmosphere, and then he pushed me who was wounded with all his strength. Because of that I helplessly collided on Princess Flora..."

Stead talked with a pained expression.

"...In other words, that guy was scared of the sin of killing a royalty and desperately saved Lady Roana, and in exchange he fell from the cliff? Then, the fault doesn't lie on Stead..."

Alphonse talked with an understanding look. But,

"The, there is no way that's true! That person saved me!"

Flora couldn't accept it and immediately protested.

"However, I was really pushed away by that guy! Isn't that right, you two seniors?"

Stead looked at two male students and asked. They were the students who pushed Stead away before. The two made a shocked expression then,

"Ye, yeah. I certainly saw that."

"I, I too."

They consented with slightly high-pitched voice. Stead abruptly smiled.

"You two really witnessed that?"

Christina asked with a deeply quiet voice.

The cold gaze toward them caused Stead and the two boys almost took a step back.

"Ye, yes. There is no mistake."

Stead was the first one who nodded. The two male students from before also nodded after him.

"...I see. What about everyone else? Is there anyone who saw the situation at that time?"

Christina asked while looking over the surrounding students.

But, the reaction of the team members was dull. They looked at each other's face and fell silent awkwardly.

"At that time everyone was pressed to deal with the monsters.... Elise, did you see anything?"

Roana asked the girl who gave the testimony of Stead colliding on Flora before this.

Stead looked coldly at the girl who was called Elise.

“Eh..., ah, no, I wonder.... I too, didn’t look that clearly so...”

Elise was answering with strangely hesitating gesture.

“You are speaking the truth?”

“Ye, yes!”

When Roana pressed her to confirm, Elise twitched and affirmed while trembling.

“Then shouldn’t we decide our plan soon? More than this and we will only go around in circles.”

Saying that, Roana looked in displeasure at Alphonse.

“Fo, for now we will escape from this forest. Is that plan alright? As a team that is being entrusted with her highness the princesses’ safety, we cannot stay here longer than this.”

Alphonse looked for a decision to Christina with a flustered look. In his true feeling, rather than going to save Rio and completely abandoned the exam, he wanted to abandon Rio by making it like it was Rio getting his just deserts while continuing the exam, so that they could reduce the decrease of their grade as much as possible. In that premise, there was a calculating consideration that if it was Rio who was a commoner that was gone, then it wouldn’t develop into a serious matter.

“Can you not check on me for every single thing? After all you are the commander, so progress the talk in your own discretion. You have kept dithering since some time ago.”

Christina scowled in displeasure and spoke without hiding her irritation.

“Ye, yes! Then, we will immediately withdraw from this place and head toward our destination.”

Blood left from Alphonse's face and he gave the conclusion in hurry. But,

“Wait! You are going to abandon that person?”

Flora spoke with a harsh tone.

“We, we are moving with team. There is no way we can move the team and take risk for the sake of a man who fell into a cliff because of his own fault.”

Alphonse was overwhelmed and talked awkwardly.

“Wha-, his own fault you say.... Then..., then, I almost fell from the cliff was also my own fault. I'll go save him alone.”

For a moment Flora was speechless, however, she immediately said that with resolve.

“You must not! What are you saying, Lady Flora.”

Roana remonstrated Flora in panic.

“Roana! Even you.... He might be seriously injured and is waiting for help.”

“...This is a problem of probability and priority. We don't know whether he is safe or not. But, either way the exam is still in progress. We cannot bet on uncertain possibility and completely waste this practice for the sake of a single civilian. That is his judgment as the commander.”

“Tha, that's why, I said I'll go alone...”

Flora faltered from Roana's argument.

“There is no way anyone here can just leave a royalty like you here alone.”

Christina cut in with a voice that was tinged with a bit of exasperation.

“Bu, but!”

“Calm down. We didn’t say that we are completely abandoning him.”

“...Eh?”

A question mark floated above Flora.

“When this team’s practice is over, we will ask the staffs to form search team immediately. That’s why--”

Christina was going to make such proposal. At that time, an abnormality occurred.

“BUMOoooo!”

A terrifying roar came from inside the forest.

Vibration ran through the air and shook the trees. The surprised animals of the forest became noisy right away, and the students’ body shook in surprise.

\*DON, DON, DON, DON\* the sound of something hitting the ground rhythmically reverberated, then a little while later a conspicuously louder sound rang out. It was the sound like something gigantic was running.

Then, a gigantic shadow ferociously leaped out to the sky from inside the forest.

“Wha, what is that?”

Roana yelled while looking above. There was a human shaped gigantic life-form there. Its hand was holding a weapon that was like a sword produced from stone. But, it was obviously not human.

It confirmed the figures of the students in midair and grinned ferociously. Without pause it fell inside the forest once more and landed on the ground. A thunderous sound along with a tremor on the ground rang out.



A shaking like a small earthquake occurred and the tip of the cliff that was becoming brittle crumbled down.

“Th, the cliff is collapsing!”

When Roana yelled that, the students took distance from the cliff edge in panic.

But, they didn’t do anything like entering the forest. Because that monster was inside the forest.

“It’s heading here. Alphonse! What should we do?”

Roana asked for a direction with a yell, but Alphonse was completely flustered.

“Eh, ah, yo, you are asking me...?”

“Are we fighting or running! Give the order quickly!”

Roana hurried Alphonse impatiently. But, even while they were doing that, the mysterious monster was approaching and its huge silhouette could be glimpsed swaying and moving inside the forest.

“Hih...”

The presence that was just too ominous made the students’ face contorted in fear. Their body froze and their legs trembled.

A step, a step, the distance was shrunk with certainty and finally its whole figure became clear.

It was a face that was like a cow that became demon. Sharp and thick horns grew out from its head, its eyes were shining red, and it was containing a ferocious madness inside.

Its height easily reached four meters. Its body surface was covered with hard black skin, its thick muscles were rugged and bulged up, and a long tail stretched out from its butt like a whip.

“Aa..., mo, monster...”

The overwhelming presence caused the students' expression to distort in despair.

But, there was only one person who didn't lose her fighting spirit. It was Christina.

"What are you all being in a daze for! You will get killed!"

Saying that, she held her rod in front of her and chanted her spell.

Lightning Ball Magic

"Thunder Ball"

Then, geometrical pattern emerged on the tip of the rod, and powerful lightning attack that was compressed into ball shot out from there powerfully. The lightning ball that had diameter of one meter shook the air cracklingly while approaching the cow headed giant. The students' eyes were lit with light of hope. But,

"BUMOooOOH!"

The cow headed giant raised a war cry and vertically swung the large sword of rock it was holding, hitting the lightning ball. \*DoON\* Along with such thunderous sound, a cloud of dust was raised and shockwave spread out.

"Wha..."

As expected even Christina turned speechless.

Thunder Ball possessed the strongest class of power from among the attack magic she could use right now. It was blocked extremely easily, so it couldn't be helped that she was astonished. It was too overwhelming.

"Gufufuh"

The cow headed giant looked at the astonished Christina and made an eerie grin.

"Hih..."

Christina's body jerked and trembled.

“Ki, Kill! I, ice element magic! Vanguard, used Enchant Physical Ability and press it back!”

Alphonse yelled in terror. The students were sacred against it that was calmly approaching. They began to chant their spell simultaneously with only the thought of not wanting to die ruling their heart.

Ice Spear Magic  
“Ice Lance”

The rearguards Flora, Roana, and Elise held up their rod and chanted the same magic together. Magic formula floated up at the tip of their rod and sharp ice spear was fired.

“Enchant Physical Ability”

The male students also chanted their spell. Their ring shined and magic formula floated up, strengthening their physical ability. They then charged behind the ice spears right away.

But, the cow headed monster withdrew from that spot with a light movement that didn't suit its large body and dodged all the ice spears. Then it immediately closed the distance from beside a vanguard male student and swung its sword.

Terror surfaced in the student's face at the approaching lump of rock before his gaze. Even so, he immediately reacted using physical ability that surpassed the possible limit of ordinary person by holding up his shield in an attempt of defense.

The result, the male student's body was strongly sent flying horizontally and his back crashed on a tree. “Gaah...”, blood spilled out from his mouth and then he collapsed on the ground limply.

Seeing that, the other students completely lost their will to fight. Even their feet that were moving forward fiercely halted. They comprehended it. It was impossible, there was no way they could win.

“Re, retreat! Retreat! Run awaaay!”

Alphonse raised a yelling voice that sounded like a scream.

The students scattered to every direction like baby spiders and escaped into the forest.

The cow headed monster laughed out “GAGAGA” while slowly chasing behind. It was as though it was having fun seeing the students getting into a panic.

On the other hand, Christina seemed to be still shocked that her lightning ball attack just now was blocked. She was standing still in a dumbfounded state.

“Lady Christina, get a hold of yourself!”

Roana noticed Christina’s abnormality and shook her body in hurry.

“Ye, yes. Thank you. Where is Flora?”

Christina gasped and asked.

“I don’t see her. Most likely she has already escaped. We should also hurry.”

“I understand.”

Christina showed a conflicted expression before she left that place together with Roana.

A little while before that, Rio was falling rapidly toward the forest from the cliff. That height easily reached thirty meters. It was an unpleasant feeling as though his heart was floating. Scary. There was no way it wasn’t scary. As long as he didn’t make any miss, it was unlikely that he would die, but even though he knew that--.

Rio took a deep breath and ejected the magic power inside his

body, then he reinforced his body's strength with full power.

There was no process of chanting spell that should be necessary if it was magic, and there was also no magic formula emerging out as magic circle. It was obvious. Right now it wasn't sorcery that Rio was using.

Physical reinforcement was divided into two types, strengthening physical ability and strengthening body strength, but using magic it was only possible to strengthen physical ability, it was considered impossible to strengthen body's strength using the present sorcery knowledge.

In the case when it was only physical strength that was strengthened, it often happened that the body couldn't keep up with the strengthened physical ability and the body broke down. Because of that various countries were continuing to research to make the strengthening of body strength a reality, but at present not even a single country was able to even grab a foothold to make it a reality.

But, for some unknown reason, Rio using a power that wasn't magic, Rio was able to strengthen not just his physical ability, but also his body's strength. Five years ago, the day when Rio recovered his memory as Amakawa Haruto, the voice of a mysterious girl became the impetus that awakened him to this power.

And then, there were various other things that differentiated Rio from the human of this world.

For example, even though he was able to pour magic power into magic formula to handle sorcery, he was unable to take in magic formula into his body and learned magic.

Another example was how he was able to see pure magic power as a faint light which was normally impossible to confirm by sight.

And then, another example was even though he was unable to take in sorcery into his body using magic formula contract, by imitating the flow of magic power of the magic formula and controlled it, he was able to reproduce pseudo sorcery.

Yes, for example, like this--, Rio pointed both his hands toward the ground.

Right after that, powerful wind gust blew violently from Rio's hands. Then, Rio's falling speed rapidly slowed by the reverse thrust of the wind.

He was unable to completely prevent the falling, but it was enough if he could slow down the speed.

Rio held out his hands and ejected win, adjusted his falling spot, and caught a moderately thick branch of a tree. With that he completely neutralized his falling momentum. His hand let go of the branch and he landed on the ground beautifully.

“-, oops.”

For the time being the danger had past, Rio wondered what he should do while looking up to the cliff.

Honestly speaking, it wasn't that difficult to go back up and rejoined the team. Using physical strengthening, a mere cliff of thirty meter wasn't something that was impossible to be climbed up. There was also no worry of falling and dying.

But, if Rio who was unable to use magic came back above the cliff unwounded, surely other would think it as strange.

That would be a bit troublesome. But, it was necessary to observe the situation above.

“For now let's just climb.”

After muttering that, Rio made a small sigh and began to act.

And then, he climbed up the cliff in the blink of eye and hid behind a tree cover while observing the students. The students had just annihilated the monsters who attacked them at that time.

Then, the students were starting to talk to each other about their plan going forward in confusion.

Honestly, it was a conversation with terrible content. The commander Alphonse and also Stead who was pushing Flora to fall only thought of their own wellbeing.

Most of the students had their concentration taken by the surprise attack and didn't properly witness the situation when Flora was falling. Using that, Stead twisted the fact with a lie. Rio couldn't suppress his faint smile when hearing that.

As the result, it ended with the responsibility of Flora falling from the cliff was wholly pushed into Rio.

Flora herself was desperately giving explanation, but Flora herself didn't witness the scene that could overturn Stead's testimony and her argument was overcome.

However, mysteriously no emotion of disappointment and despair welled up inside him. That was because he didn't hold any expectation whatsoever since the beginning.

Rio was living at the base of a society of social status where authority meant everything. Social status itself became authority inside such society of social status. As long as one had tremendous authority, they would be able to have their way in most things, even if it was unreasonable. Because there wasn't any thought of curtailing authority, what could hold back the authority from running wild was only the same authority.

That was why, as long as he was living in a society of social status, Rio who wasn't a noble or anything couldn't oppose the authority. Rio had learned that it was the reality since a long time ago.

He attended the royal academy that was a learning hall for noble even in such situation because there was a lot of things that he had to learn no matter what. He had come to a clear decision that such relationship would be only until he graduated, and his time together with Celia was pleasant, that was why although he thought it was hard he didn't feel it was something unbearable.

But, perhaps this was already the right time. Even if he went back to the academy like this, the possibility was high that he would only get wrongly suspected in regard to the incident where Flora almost fell from cliff and got dragged into troublesome complication. And then, when such thing happened, Rio didn't have the strength to brush away the unreasonable suspicion.

Then, perhaps it would be bitter if he just left the academy like this.

He actually planned to leave the academy after graduation, but in these five years Rio had learned most of what he should learn. That was why there was no more need to continue staying in the academy.

Right now if no one reported that he was still alive here, he would be treated as someone dead. It would be necessary to return to his room in dormitory to dress up himself in minimum, but if he picked up the right time and acted carefully, it shouldn't be impossible to sneak in without anyone noticing.

Suddenly, Celia's face flashed inside Rio's head. But, this was something that he had to decide sooner or later. It was simply that the implementation's time was slightly accelerated. That was why--.

'Let's try it'--Rio decided in the end of his hesitation.

And then, a cow headed giant that was like a demon suddenly appeared at that timing.

The students were instantly panicked. For an instant he pondered whether she should give assistance, but he had no duty at all to proactively help people who were going to abandon him.

Rio stayed hiding behind his cover while observing the situation.

The cow headed giant was really powerful. The possibility of victory for the students fighting it from the front was extremely low.

But, mysteriously Rio didn't think that the enemy was fighting at full power.



After all a body that huge boasted such unusual physical ability. If it felt like it, the monster should be able to close the distance right away and finished the fight.

And yet, it only looked like the monster moved around with showy movement and fanned up the students' terror mischievously. It wasn't like it didn't attack at all, but in spite of that it seemed to be holding back.

In the meantime the students started escaping. The battle line crumbled and they fell into complete panic. They had no composure to care about other people at all. The majority of the students moved their legs while only thinking about their own safety. The cow headed giant was chasing after them from behind leisurely. Rio was thinking that perhaps they might die and his face grimaced slightly, even so Rio continued to stay still.

Flora quickly carried the male student who fainted after receiving the cow headed giant's attack behind the cover of a tree. She laid him down in a comfortable position and applied Heal.

The countenance of the male student that became pale recovered for the better and his condition was already stabilized.

If he was left alone, he would die from the internal damage, but right now he was leaning on the tree with peaceful sleeper's breathing. He would wake up if he was allowed to keep resting like this.

The other students escaped all over the place, and the cow headed giant also laughed eerily while going somewhere. There was no more sound of flurried tumult.

The space with thick trees and shrubs lined up fell into uncanny silence. When the emergency situation reached a point where she could take a pause, this time anxiety suddenly descended on her.

She was worried. About Christina and others who were separated from her. She wondered whether they were able to escape.

And then, Flora thought of Rio. The young boy who was her benefactor, who was scorned as a dunce in Beltram Royal Academy--.

Flora was harboring a feeling of guilt toward Rio. Besides, she was thinking that surely he hated her.

Because surely that was the case.

Flora was unable to pay Rio back at all from five years ago until today.

In the past, Rio was treated as a criminal inside the castle and he was made to feel various bitter experiences.

Furthermore, even though he was enrolled into Beltram Royal Academy under the pretense of giving reward, Rio was despised and insulted as unnecessary by the students in the academy because of the difference in status.

Rio was always alone--when Flora realized that after enrolling into the academy for a while she was shocked.

Many times other people directed malice and hurt him. But, even so, he didn't try to hurt other people on his own accord. He only looked forward and pushed on straight.

She thought he was a really strong person. Unlike her who was only living by observing other people's mood.

Perhaps because of that, when Flora noticed she was admiring Rio. When she caught sight of Rio's figure in the academy, her eyes would chase after him.

The people in the academy made fun of Rio, but it was only her who knew about his good side. She recently heard the female students in her class saying that Rio was cool from his match against a knight. Her feeling turned a bit complicated hearing that, but she also felt a bit proud and happy.

But, Rio was always making a face that looked somewhat lonely. Each time Flora saw that face from the side, Flora would feel a pain in

her chest as though her heart was squeezed.

She wanted to try talking with him. There were a lot of things she wanted to talk with him. And then, she wanted to become his friend.

Though perhaps someone like her who was unable to summon courage and only watched from afar had no qualification for that.

Thinking that, Flora's chest felt a prickling pain again.

Just once, she had seen the figure of Rio talking intimately with Celia by coincidence not a long time ago.

It was after school. At that time the two of them were talking to each other really closely. She felt really envious that Rio was showing only Celia an expression that normally he would never make.

That was why, she went against her elder sister's instruction to not interact with Rio. Today she summoned her courage and tried talking to Rio. She felt really nervous and her heart was beating fast, but she wanted to become strong like Rio, so she summoned courage wanting to advance forward even just by a step.

As a result she was able to talk with Rio just for a bit. She felt happy of that and wanted to talk more with him. The remaining time for Rio to stay in the elementary school of the royal academy was short, but she thought to be brave from here on to try to be a bit more proactive. And yet--.

Rio saved Flora and fell from the cliff. Even though everything that she did was only like paying back kindness with evil, he still saved her even then. And yet they wouldn't be able to meet again. She didn't want that.

'That's why, god, please'--Flora muttered inside her heart.

*Please keep that person safe.*

It happened when she was praying like that. Somewhere in the forest, \*zun\* a sound of impact as though something kicked on the ground reverberated. Flora's body twitched.

“That, monster...?”

This time a thunderous sound as though something with huge mass landed on the ground was resounding. It raised a piercing war cry while rapidly approaching at Flora’s direction--.

“I, it’s coming back? The monster just now...”

Flora’s expression went pale right away.

“I, I have to run.... Ah, no, but...”

There was a fainted male student right beside her. She wanted to run. But, she couldn’t leave him alone, and she might get found out if she ran away while carrying him.

She didn’t understand at all what she should do. She was scared and couldn’t think at all.

It was approaching until very close in the meanwhile. There was no hesitation in the thing’s footstep[.

\*Zun, zun, zun\* the footsteps resounded with fixed rhythm without any disorder.

*Wh, why is it coming here?*

Flora covered her mouth with both hands and pushed down her scream. Flora was holding her breath while trembling.

Its footsteps stopped behind the tree where Flora was hiding. She could hear rough breathing sound.

“Hih...”

No. She didn’t want to die. Scary.

“A, au...”

Her body was shivering in terror while she was looking up. Then, the cow headed monster showed its face like a demon. Its left hand

reaching out to grab Flora's trembling body.

It was no good already. Tears gathered in her eyes and she closed her eyes. The possibility of death crossed at the back of her mind and her body cowered. The hand that should be approaching didn't come no matter how much time passed. Far from that,

“GAAah!”, she could hear the pained voice of the cow headed giant.

Flora fearfully opened her eyes. Then, the sight of the left arm of the cow headed giant severed with a vertical straight line was reflected in her field of vision. The severed arm fell on the ground and rolled over.

“Eh...?”

Flora opened her mouth in a daze. Right beside her a boy wearing academy uniform was standing. A very familiar boy with black hair carrying a bastard sword--Rio.

“GUah!”

The cow headed giant raised a war cry and leaped.

It took distance from Rio, rotated in the air, and landed along with a tremor. An intense emotion was concealed in its eyes and it glared at Rio in vigilance.

“Carry that person and run away from here quickly.”

Rio observed the cow headed giant without letting his guard down while talking to Flora calmly.

“Eh, ah, that...”

Flora's mouth was opening and closing with a dumbfounded look.

“Quickly!” “Ye, yes!”

When Rio spoke with slightly stronger tone, Flora jerked and replied. She hurriedly held the fainted male student by his shoulder.

After confirming that, Rio opened his mouth once more.

“Please go!”

Flora moved away, at the same time Rio charged to in front of the enemy. The enemy swung down its sword to fight back. Rio also matched it by swinging his bastard sword with two hands.

The two swords clashed midair and sparks scattered.

Rio parried the opponent's strength to below and the cow headed giant's sword sunk into the ground. Not letting go of that opening, he slashed his sword from below to diagonally above toward the opponent's torso.

The enemy hurriedly bent backward to dodge the attack, but Rio's sword grazed its torso. Rio was surprised that the enemy's skin was harder than expected. But, it wasn't by any means impossible to cut.

It wasn't a lethal wound, but he was able to inflict damage.

“BU, BUMOooooo!”

The cow headed giant raised an enraged war cry and lifted up its stone sword before wildly mowing to the side.

Rio lightly leaped and dodged the enemy's sword that was passing below him. He twisted his body midair and landed after a full rotation. In that moment he slashed his sword in a low stance to injure the opponent's leg.

The cow headed giant leaped to dodge that and then it used its falling momentum to strike vertically down with its sword. Instant death was unavoidable if the attack hit. Rio dodged it with a side step.

And then, the next moment the gaze of both sides crossed, and a slash that eye couldn't follow flew from both sides. The swords clashed and powerful impact and gale were produced, shaking the surrounding tree.



Because there was overwhelming difference in mass between both swords, Rio's sword might snap right away if they crossed swords normally. In order to not let that happen, a severe parrying technique was demanded from Rio's side.

But, Rio's sword was drawing a trajectory that didn't show the slightest hesitation. The training that was accumulated through long months and years moved the body precisely. The sword showed no sign of snapping.

Although, it was by no means that Rio had any leeway. In front of the countless sword strikes that were filled with thick killing intent where even a single attack might dealt a lethal wound if it hit him, unpleasant chills continued to run through his back without stopping.

He was desperate. He didn't want to die--Rio wielded his sword with only that thought in his heart.

But, if he really didn't want to die, it would be better to escape without challenging the cow headed demon into battle. He didn't have even a speck of dying wish, but when he was challenging this monster into battle, Rio didn't know whether he would be able to win or not.

And yet, Rio was fighting the enemy like this. He was challenging it into a fight when he noticed.

Even he himself didn't understand why.

If he was forced to say, then perhaps it was because there remained a feeling inside him that wanted to help Flora even just for a little as the only one who was trying to act for his sake. Even his reason of saving Flora when she was falling from the cliff was similar. But, perhaps that was nothing more than his hypocrisy.

Even if he got carried away by his feeling and act in a way that he thought was right, it didn't mean that he would be rewarded for it. He understood that. In fact, Rio had experienced a failure by doing that.

But, even so, his body moved following his emotion. Even though he got a rare chance to leave the academy without anyone be the



wiser, he wasted it by himself.

But, it couldn't be helped if he was found out. What would be would be--and so on, while thinking of such things as though it wasn't his own problem, Rio was swinging his sword desperately.

Perhaps because his senses were becoming sharper due to the physical strengthening, all of the opponent's movement looked slow.

Mysteriously he didn't feel like he would lose. Rio and the monster were displaying an exchange of sword strikes like a storm for only a few moments but, the moment when the equilibrium crumbled suddenly arrived.

Until then Rio was parrying the enemy's sword with the necessary minimum movement while searching for the chance in order to release a full power attack at the critical timing, then that chance arrived.

“BUMOo!”

The cow headed giant held up its sword in a big way along with a howl. Perhaps it was getting impatient from being unable to finish the fight against an opponent with a body built that was overwhelmingly inferior, its movement was turning rough.

Rio didn't overlook that instantaneous opening. Faster than the enemy could swing down its sword, he quickly swung his sword horizontally toward the enemy's torso. Then, Rio's attack caught the enemy's body.

The splendid clean hit made the giant's face showed an anguished expression. It swung around its sword angrily, but Rio back stepped and retreated to a safe range.

But, he didn't run away by all means. His true aim was to measure the distance in order to land a full power attack. Rio gripped his sword with two hands and kicked on the ground powerfully.

“-AAAAAAAAA!”

Rio raised a high spirited voice while unleashing an attack with all his strength. The cow headed giant also desperately swung down its sword, but its attack missed. Rio used the enemy's body as stepping stone and dashed up right away, then without pause he lopped off its neck resolutely.

The severed neck danced in the air. The giant body that lost its head staggered and fell on its knees on the ground. Light fell off from the crimson eyes that contained fierce glint.

Before long, the cow headed giant's body made a snapping sound and started to crumble rapidly.

It became little pieces in the blink of eye and vanished completely leaving no trace behind.

What remained was only a blue colored large stone--it was a magic stone. Furthermore it was considerably large. It was incomparable with the magic stone that goblin or orc left behind. Rio picked up the magic stone that fell on the ground.

“So it's a monster as I thought...”

Rio stared intently at the fist sized magic stone while letting out a small mutter.

Magic stone was the only thing left behind by dead monster. In other words, for a life-form to leave behind magic stone in its death was the greatest proof that it was a monster.

But, it was very rare for a monster this atrocious to wander around. If there was such a monster here there would be no way this kind of place would be used for practice. He wondered why such monster would appear inside this forest. Did it migrate from somewhere? At that time when Rio was pondering that question--.

“Lady Flora!”

The tranquil space of the forest was disturbed by a resounding loud voice calling Flora's name from afar. It might be the voice a person coming to search for Flora.

Rio ran his gaze around and surveyed the forest that blocked his field of vision due to the trees. Then, Rio found a squirming silhouette at a position that he could barely confirm by sight. It was Flora. Surely she was worried of Rio and observed the fight from a distance. But, he didn't want to be dragged into troublesome matter even more than this. Thinking so, Rio immediately left from there.

Reis who was wearing a black robe was floating in the air far above. His gaze was directed at Rio who was leaving with a speed that surpassed human limit.

“He's gone. Haha, I was able to see something more interesting than expected. It was worth it to send a minotaur that I deliberately strengthened.”

Chuckle. Reis's lips were carved with a grin that he couldn't hold back.

“From that black hair, is he a descendant from immigrant who drifted here from Yagumo region? Then I can understand how he is able to use spirit magic. But still, what a terrifying kid at that age.”

The man put further consideration toward Rio.

Spirit magic--, that was a secret art that wasn't sorcery which didn't spread at all in Strahl region.

If someone searched the old books they would be able to dig up a bit of record about it, but there would be no hop of knowing the detail. The best they would be able to find was only its common point with sorcery that it was able to cause supernatural phenomenon by using magic power, and that it was an art that was used among elf, dwarf, and beast man who human race called as demi-human with scorn.

But, somehow Reis possessed insight regarding spirit magic that normally would be impossible to learn.

That was why, he was also able to comprehend just how abnormal it was for Rio who was a human race and lived in this Strahl region to

be able to use that level of spirit magic in that age.

“Even after approaching this close, I cannot feel the characteristic wavelength of spirit. It doesn’t look like he is contracted with spirit. Well, I’ll just remember him and leave him to his own devices. That will also suit that person’s plan. I too should return to my original duty.”

After saying that, the man glided away to somewhere else.

# Chapter 7

At the evening of the day of practice, Celia was walking inside the school building of Beltram Royal Academy.

“Geez, his way of using people is rough! Do something like an investigation by yourself. Just because I’m the youngest among the teacher, this is too much. Using a person like a secretary. Furthermore it took time because it was searching about a monster from the era of god and demon war.”

Celia was mouthing her dissatisfaction in a huff while heading to her destination the headmaster office. The source of her anger was because she was ordered by her superior to investigate about a certain monster while she was doing investigation for her research in library.

“What’s more telling me to come to headmaster office.... Though he was strangely impatient, did something happen?”

For a moment she wondered if the monster that she investigated actually appeared, but she immediately rethought that there was no way that was true.

The monster that Celia investigated was a monster called Minotaur that possessed human shape and cow face. It was an existence that played an active role in a great war that happened more than a thousand years ago which was now called god and demon war.

God and demon war was a war that unfolded between human race that was led by the Six Wise Gods and the demon race that was led by the demon king. It was said that minotaur had their population drastically reduced at the closing of the god and demon war.

It seemed that their existence would rarely be confirmed even now at the countries in the north and west, but there was no case of sighting of that monster in this Beltram Kingdom for a few hundred

years.

While thinking of various things like that, Celia arrived at the headmaster room. She stopped walking in front of the room and noticed that the door was slightly opened.

Then, Celia could hear the voices of the headmaster Garcia Fontaine and the elderly teacher who ordered her to do the investigation. Celia observed the situation inside while thinking whether it was alright for her to enter.

“However, for her highness the second princess to almost fall from a cliff, it’s disquieting. Is it alright to think of this as a case where some kind of punishment is necessary?”

Garcia asked with slightly annoyed look.

Celia froze spontaneously at the uneasy content of the conversation.

“Perhaps that cannot be avoided. But, there is also dissension regarding all the facts. It seems there is no doubt that it was the son of Duke Huguenot who directly collided with her highness but...”

“And?”

“More than half of the students are giving testimony that in the first place the cause was because the student called Rio pushed away Duke Huguenot’s son. On the other hand, her highness the second princess herself is insisting that there is no way that’s true...”

‘Eh? Rio? What is going on?’--Celia gulped hearing the unexpected name.

“Why is that?”

“That’s because it was the student called Rio who saved her highness from almost falling below the cliff. Though it seems he was the one who fell from the cliff instead.”

‘Falling from the cliff? Is Rio alive?’--something cold ran through

Celia's back.

"Then, how is it going with that Rio?"

"His whereabouts is unknown. After falling from the cliff, it seemed he appeared in front of the isolated second princess who was under attack of the later mentioned unknown monster, but he immediately absconded after defeating the monster I heard."

'I'm glad. He is alive'--Celia sighed in relieve, though it was concerning that Rio's whereabouts was unknown.

"If that's the case then it seems that kid didn't have any intention to harm her highness the second princess but, do you understand his motive of pushing Duke Huguenot's brat?"

"The students said that it was because he fell into panic when the swarm of monsters attacked."

"That Rio fell into panic just from getting attacked by monsters?" -- Celia felt a strange discomfort.

"I see.... Then, is there proof that can overturn the testimony of half of the students?"

"No, it seems there is no student including her highness the second princess who witnessed any such scene."

"Hmmm..."

"Him absconding like this is the proof that he has something to feel guilty about. He should come forward to explain if he isn't involved at all."

Garcia was making a pondering face. The elderly male teacher said that unabashedly.

"That's only if he can proof his innocence perfectly."

Garcia muttered with a small voice.

“Ha?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

“Haa.... Then, what should we do about the report to the castle? There is strong pressure from the house of Duke Huguenot on us, it’s necessary to write the report promptly.”

“Hm. Right now it also won’t be good for his majesty if Duke Huguenot slipped into a blunder. Luckily there is also a convenient sacrifice available. It will be a bad move to recklessly blow up this matter out of proportion.”

“Then, is it alright to put the report to submit to the castle in a way that placed the problem on the student called Rio?”

‘What’s with that? From the start you all don’t have any intention to let Rio explain himself?’--Celia felt a strong indignation at the progress of the talk that was ridiculing Rio.

“Do that. There is also testimony from many people. Duke Huguenot will surely take care of the matter skillfully in the castle. We at least have to make him do that much.”

Frankly, the truth didn’t matter for Garcia. The scenario that was the most convenient and didn’t blow up the matter out of proportion was the truth.

“Then, I will make the document for the report to the castle like that.”

“Right. I’ll leave it to you. I will bring the report to his majesty and ask for his judgment. During that time notify the teachers to restrain the boy if he shows up in the academy.”

“Understood.”

Celia was quivering anxiously while eavesdropping the two’s businesslike conversation.

‘Aa, what to do, what to do?’ --At this rate Rio would be in danger.



Celia believed in Rio. She didn't understand the detail of the event with just this conversation, but she couldn't imagine that Rio losing himself from terror and pushed Stead because of that. ...Though if it was the reverse it was more likely.

Perhaps Rio absconded because he had realized that a false suspicion was put on him.

Just speaking would be simple, but doing something like proving that he didn't do it was a case of devil's proof. If a suspicion was given because of a false charge and it would only be a waste of effort to clear that suspicion, it would be better to immediately escape right from the start. Celia's face was broody, but she took a deep breath to calm herself before knocking the door.

At night, Rio returned to the capital and sneaked into his room at the dormitory inside the royal academy's ground.

Originally the gate of the city was closed during the night, because of that it was impossible to enter inside the rampart.

But, Rio used physical strengthening to strengthen his body and physical ability to surpass human's limit and accomplished his infiltration by act of force of jumping over the rampart. He also wouldn't be suspected if he entered inside the city. He also sneaked inside the noble quarter in the same way by jumping over the rampart inside the city, and then he quickly headed toward the academy.

Because most of the students went home at night, the security was relatively light. For Rio who was knowledgeable about the academy's ground, it was a piece of cake to walk around without getting found out by the patrolling security.

Rio opened the door and entered inside his familiar dormitory room. From the start it was a room with few belongings, but there was still no sign that someone had entered inside. After confirming that, Rio took out a bag that was hidden under the bed. Inside the bag was the money he received five years ago after rescuing Flora. It was mostly untouched. It was an amount that was more than enough for

his life from now on.

Next, Rio took out clothes from a drawer and changed. He put the money bag into the belt bag that was hanging on his waist. The academy's uniform was excellent as battle clothes, but to his regret it was too conspicuous.

Like that he finished his preparation. Then Rio left the room and headed toward the only person he could trust in the academy--the room where Celia was.

*It will be great if she is still here but...*

Celia often shut herself in her lab until late at night. Rio prayed that she still hadn't gone home while walking through the familiar underground passage of the library tower.

Because many of the teachers had also gone home, the passage was quieter than usual.

When he arrived at Celia's lab while probing for sign of human, there was light of artifact leaking out from the door's gap. It seemed Celia was still there.

Rio slowly knocked the door.

"Who is it, coming at this ti-..."

Celia came out with a slightly displeased look, but her eyes opened wide in astonishment when she saw Rio's face. She almost yelled unconsciously but Rio gently shut her mouth with his finger.

"Shh. I'm sorry to come at this time. I want to talk for a bit."

Rio talked with a small voice.

Celia almost blushed, but she looked around restlessly at the corridor before,

"Come in."

Muttering that, she invited Rio to enter the room.

Both of them entered inside and then the door closed with a thud. While Rio was at a loss at from where he should start explaining, Celia strongly hugged Rio.

“Se, sensei?”

Rio let out a bewildered voice while feeling Celia’s worm across the clothes. \*Thump\*, it felt like the heartbeat of Celia’s heart was transmitted.

“You aren’t injured right?”

After a bit of time, Celia touched all over Rio’s body searchingly.

“It’s ticklish. I’m fine sensei.”

Rio said while smiling from the ticklish sensation.

“I’m glad...”

Celia smiled in relieve with tears gathering in her eyes.

‘Aa, it’s Rio. He is safe’--she was hopelessly happy knowing that. Celia was liberated from the uneasiness and it felt like the block in her heart was taken off.

“Could it be, sensei has heard about what happened in the practice?”

“Yes. They said Rio pushed Stead which caused Lady Flora to be in danger. Also, they said that Rio defeated a minotaur alone...”

“Putting aside the latter, the former is a false charge.”

Rio told Celia with an exasperated voice.

“As I thought! There is no way Rio would do something like that.”

“Thank you very much. So sensei believes in me...”

“That’s obvious!”

Celia proclaimed vigorously.

“But, the other people aren’t like sensei. So I’m really happy.”

Saying that, Rio smiled awkwardly. Then Celia hugged Rio one more time.

“...It’s okay. I believe in you. After all I know Rio.”

‘I don’t have any ally in this academy’--Rio might be thinking like that.

That was why, ‘you have an ally here’--Celia wanted to tell Rio so.

“Sensei...”

Warm. He wondered when was the last time he felt the warmth of opposite sex. Rio was embraced by Celia as she wished while he was feeling the comfort that was hard to resist.



“Hey, can you tell me what happened? Honestly, I still don’t understand just what happened...”

Celia finally asked.

“That’s, right. About what happened in the middle of the practice-  
\_”

“What’s with that! Rio didn’t do anything bad at all!”

When Rio finished telling everything, Celia exposed her anger in dissatisfaction.

“The person with authority is the one who decide what is bad and what isn’t.”

Rio spoke philosophically as though he had resigned himself from the start.

In a society of social status, justice was a fluid sense of value that was determined by the strong. Therefore, for the weak justice never brought a convenient result. Justice existed for the sake of the strong.

“That’s true, but. Rio, even though you didn’t do anything bad, you are pinned with false charge!”

Celia yelled with grieving look at Rio’s realistic words.

“But, even if I tell the truth, the people with authority in this country won’t become my ally, far from that they would instead come to crush me. After all the eldest son of Duke Huguenot is involved with this case.”

At present the number one noble in Beltram Kingdom was Duke Huguenot. In contrast Rio was nothing but a commoner with no social status or backer.

If Rio exposed the truth of the case this time, the house of Duke

Huguenot would surely receive heavy political damage. After all although it was only an accident, the eldest son of that house almost caused the death of a royalty.

But, considering the present political situation of Beltram Kingdom, it really wouldn't be a pleasant situation for the mainstream nobility and royalty including the king himself.

Because at present, Duke Arbeau whose influence was decreased due to his failing five years ago was regaining his clout inside the royal court to the degree that couldn't really be underestimated.

Recently Duke Huguenot faction and Duke Arbeau faction were having a heated argument behind the scenes regarding the diplomacy policy toward a certain enemy country. The name of that enemy country was Proxia Empire--, it was an emerging nation at the north that invaded several small countries around it and held a tense relation with Beltram Kingdom.

The king and Duke Huguenot faction held moderate opinion of maintaining the current tense relation toward such Proxia Empire, on the other hand Duke Arbeau faction held aggressive argument that the kingdom should assertively expand the military.

Right now Duke Huguenot faction was still possessing great influence, but if Duke Huguenot stumbled here, the scale would immediately tilt toward Duke Arbeau faction. If that happened it wouldn't be strange even if war broke out anytime. That wouldn't be a desirable development for the majority of the royalty and nobility including the king.

At the present situation that had such political background, would the main faction of the royalty and nobility wish for Duke Huguenot to stumble? Would they be driven by righteous indignation and exposed Stead's foolishness under the sun, recklessly aggravating the situation? No, if everything could be settled peacefully by pushing all the responsibility to a single commoner, than they surely would think that it was a cheap price to pay. Even Rio and Celia could easily understand that if they thought about it a bit calmly.

“Sorry. I actually should do something about this but...”

Celia bit her lip and apologized in frustration.

Even if Celia appealed for Rio's innocence, it was clear that it wouldn't be sufficient. Even if she was feeling indignant due to her idealistic thought, it would be meaningless without the strength to confront the reality. It was unbearably frustrating.

"Please don't apologize."

Rio said with a kind voice.

"It's thanks to sensei. Because Celia-sensei was here for me, I was able to live until this far without going rotten. I'm glad I was able to meet you. I'm really thinking so from my heart."

"Rio..."

Celia's face distorted sadly. She somehow understood what he was going to say next.

"That's why, I want to say my farewell only to sensei. I will leave this country temporarily."

The cruel and sad words of farewell, those were words that were just as expected for Celia.

"...Do you have a destination in mind?"

"I have said it before, I'm thinking to head to my parents' birthplace."

"The birthplace of Rio's parents, don't tell me you are going to Yagumo region? Really? Will you be fine?"

"Well, I'll manage somehow, perhaps."

Rio answered as brightly as possible in order to assure Celia.

"...Should I come along with you too? Do you have money?"

After a momentary pause, Celia spoke with a brooding expression.



“It will become a serious affair if sensei vanished. I’ll be fine. If it’s money I still have a lot of the reward money remaining. That’s right, I will write a letter addressed to sensei in the middle of my journey. Naturally I’ll use a fake name for it though.”

“...You have to write no matter what okay? If you forget, I won’t forgive you.”

“Yes.” Rio nodded with a smile.

“But, what kind of name you will use?”

“Let’s see. Then, ...Haruto.”

After a bit of hesitation, Rio told Celia his fake name. That was Rio’s name at his previous existence.

“Haruto, Haruto is it.”

Celia hummed that name and carved it into her brain.

“Then, I’ll depart soon.”

Rio informed as though to sever the reluctance of parting and he gently pushed away Celia’s body.

“Ah...”

Celia let out a hoarse voice when Rio’s warmth separated from her.

“We will, be able to meet again right?”

But, she immediately made the best smile she could muster and asked with a trembling voice.

“...Yes, surely we will be able to meet again.”

There was a pause when Rio was thinking for a bit before he nodded and showed a soft smile.

“Then, take care of yourself, and return back safely. ...See you again.”

Celia muffled the anxiety that was whirling inside her chest and smiled with a slightly pained face.

“Yes.”

Rio replied so before he slowly turned around. He was going away from Celia for one step, two steps.

Celia’s chest felt like it would burst when she was staring at his back. If she let go of her feeling even just for a bit, she might cry and cling on Rio’s back.

But, that was no good. Right now she mustn’t cry. She had to see him off resolutely, so to not hold Rio back. Celia bit her lip strongly.

And then, Rio quietly vanished from the room without saying anything further.

\*Click\*, the door closed quietly.

The next moment, the damn in Celia’s eyes broke and tears spilled out.

Thinking back now, it was Celia who was saved by their time together.

Since her childhood, Celia continued to advance further and further forward. Many times she became target of jealousy from her surroundings and she didn’t have any close friend near her, so a talking partner who didn’t harbor the slightest self-interest inside themselves was something fresh and precious for her.

She enjoyed her time together with Rio every day. She was helplessly happy when one day Rio told her that she was his friend.

“Sorry, Rio. I, cannot do anything...”

Sobbing voice continued to resound inside of Celia’s room for a while.

“Excuse me.”

Flora visited the office of her father Philip III. After receiving permission and entered inside, there wasn't just Philip III inside. Flora's eyes opened wide in surprise because Garcia was also there.

But, perhaps it was convenient instead that the headmaster Garcia was also here. Flora pinched the fringe of her dress and bowed while harboring determination inside her heart.

“Flora, what's your business?”

Philip III had faintly noticed Flora's intention, but he asked her brazenly.

“It's about the incident in the outdoor practice. I came here in order to ask Father about it.”

Flora spoke with a slightly tense voice and determination on her face. Philip III's eyes slightly opened wide seeing a glimpse of her daughter's strong side that had never really come out until now.

“...Don't worry. We have heard about that incident from Garcia.”

“Than that person, Master Rio naturally won't receive any blame then?”

Flora asked the result that she wished for straight to her father.

“Forgive me, but we also cannot do that.”

“...Why is that?”

Philip III's face clouded and he shook his head. Flora turned a blaming gaze toward him.

“We aren't making light of your testimony by any means. But, it's also a fact that many of the students witnessed him pushing away the eldest son of Duke Huguenot. As the result of that, you a member of the royal family met danger. That's enough reason for punishment.”

“But, that person saved me! There is no way he did anything like that!”

“Then why is that boy concealing himself? We are also thankful to him for saving you several times. But, it cannot be helped even if his current action is being suspected.”

“That’s...that’s because, everyone is being malicious toward that person! Surely he doesn’t trust us...”

“Hoho, ah youth.”

Garcia spoke cheerfully while Flora was talking insistently.

“What do you mean by that, Headmaster Garcia?”

Flora pouted.

“I mean that ideal and reality are not always one and the same. It will be better if your highness also quickly understand that as someone who is living in a privileged class.”

“...Please don’t divert from the topic. In the first place what kind of report that you gave to Father? Please give me an explanation that I can accept.”

Flora pressed her question as though to say that she wouldn’t be tricked.

“Oh hoh, I am only compiling the testimony of the students.”

Garcia was making a smile like a good natured grandfather in contrast to his words.

“Garcia, don’t bully my cute daughter too much.”

“Hoho, my apologizes.”

Garcia spoke apologizing words after the warning from Philip III. Although he was thinking “What a doting parent”, he didn’t say it out loud.

“Flora. There is a reason to punish him, because of that, it will be a bad form toward the nobles if we do nothing in regard to this incident. But, it’s also a fact that boy had saved you from danger. We will charge him for his crime, but we will also think about the lightening his punishment. Can you accept that compromise?”

“That action is too soft.”

Garcia muttered to himself. Philip III glared at Garcia to shut him up.

“Even if his punishment is lightened, that will still leave behind criminal record that will follow him...”

Flora spoke with a sullen tone.

In other words, at the end Rio would still be treated like the bad guy like that.

He would be recognized publicly as someone guilty. The future for a person with criminal record wouldn’t be a bright one. In the case that Rio was living in Beltram Kingdom from here on, it would be the same like having his path of success closed.

“Hmm, but, you see...”

Garcia made a delighted smile and watched the conversation of the parent and child as though it was completely unrelated to him. Philip III moved his gaze and asked for help from Garcia with a completely troubled face.

“Your highness, calm down for a bit. We too don’t have that much free time to go along with a child’s selfishness.”

Garcia joined the talk with patronizing words. Flora closed her mouth with an angry expression.

“I just cannot tolerate a mistake being carried out.”

“That’s what I’m calling being a child. Detach yourself from emotion when taking action and speaking. For a royalty, doing

something that goes against your emotion is an everyday experience.”

In the first place it was already too childish for her to feel conflicted just because of something of this level. Although Garcia thought that, he didn't say it out loud.

Flora fell silent completely and tears gathered in her eyes. She was painfully made to understand that she was being treated as an immature child, and no matter what she said the other party wouldn't listen to her. She was vexed by that.

Until now Flora had lived by honestly listening to what her father and her big sister told her. Because she believed by doing that she wouldn't make a mistake and did the right thing.

But, she felt like she wouldn't be unable to do that no matter what just in this matter.

“Enough, already.”

She muttered something that she didn't even think of with a subdued look. She thoroughly understood that the words of the current her didn't have any power. She couldn't do anything with her own strength. Her heart felt so painful as though her body was being torn.

What she could do was only to pray for Rio's safety. Flora cursed her own powerlessness.

The time was year 996 of the Holy Calendar--five years already passed since Rio became aware of his reincarnation to this world.

# Epilogue

Changing the place, at the noble quarter of royal capital Beltrand. In a room of Duke Huguenot's mansion, the present head of the family, Gustav Huguenot was looking down on a girl.

The age of girl looked like she wasn't even ten years old yet. Her pearl orange hair reached until her shoulder. Her face was really cute, but there was no vitality in her gaze at all.

The girl was wearing a light brown loose robe. Underneath it she was only wearing a thin cloth that looked easy to move in but seemed really cold.

But, the girl's greatest peculiarity was in a different spot. Yes, on her head there were small fox ears, and then there was a fox tail growing out from her buttocks.

Those peculiar body traits meant that the girl was a fox beastman.

Beastman race--an existence that was grouped together with elf race and dwarf race as demi-human race by the human race.

Because the territory of demi-human race was in the middle of the continent, they were mostly nonexistent in the west part of the continent, Strahl region where human race was living. In the first place demi-human race would never show up in the territory of human race.

But, in an extremely rare chance there would be demi-human who intruded into the territory of human race because of curiosity, and there were also demi-humans who were raised from ancient time by human as slave. That kind of demi-humans had the destiny to be treated as slave.

Even among them the treatment of beastman race was terrible.

There were a lot of people who thought of beastman who was half beast and half human as impure existence and looked down on them.

The nobles of human race had custom to own beastman slave as a refined hobby.

Even though they were impure existence, they would be able to find value in their existence as the pet of their noble master. The nobles were seriously believing such thing.

The girl's mother was captured as slave. Her health worsened several years after giving birth to the girl and died. By the way, when human race mated with beastman race, the child that was born would completely inherit the trait of one side of the parents, so the girl was a pure beastman.

The girl was kept and raised by Duke Huguenot since her birth. Therefore, she was able to do the minimum daily life conversation, but she didn't receive decent education. There was only one skill that she was made to learn--.

"That is the clothes of the assassination target. Remember the scent."

Duke Huguenot threw a piece of clothing to the fox eared girl.

Yes, the girl was trained with the skill of assassin.

The physical ability of beastman race was remarkably high compared to human race. Their five senses were also excellent, for example fox beastman's sense of smell was as good as dog. They would become excellent battle puppet if they were raised.





“Yes.”

The girl nodded and put the clothing on her nose to remember the scene. And then, she kept the fabric on her pocket.

“The target’s age is twelve years old. The gender is male. His name is Rio. He has black hair, so you should be able to single him out right away with his appearance. Kill him even if you have to pay with your life. I raised you for that sake. You won’t have any hope of escaping as long as that collar is on you. Go.”

“I, understand.”

The fox eared girl nodded with tottering speech in order to respond to Duke Huguenot’s command. A metal collar glinted dully in the place of her eyes that had lost their light from despair.

After that, the girl put on a hood on her head, exited the room, and got out of the mansion by foot.

\*Sniff sniff, sniff sniff\*. When she tried searching the assassination target by smell, for some reason she felt a strange nostalgia.

Pleasant warmth. Inside her chest that should have gone cold since a long time ago, she felt like there was a little bit of warmth.

But, even that mysterious feeling immediately vanished.

The girl walked out from the mansion in order to search and kill Rio who became the assassination target.

# Afterword

All of you dear readers from the published version (this book), nice to meet you. I am Kitayama Yuuri.

All of you dear readers from the web version, I'm always greatly in your debt. This is Kitayama Yuuri.

No matter which readers are you, I'm truly thankful from the bottom of my heart that you have picked up "Seirei Gensouki 1. Kingdom of Falsehood" at this chance.

Now then, perhaps there are readers who are feeling puzzled that I'm mentioning published version and web version, so please let me explain about the circumstance there for now.

In the first place this work "Seirei Gensouki", is a novel that I'm posting even now at the novel site "Shousetsuka ni narou".

There while I was receiving the favor from many readers, I was blessed and received a call from HJ Bunko, and like this my work proceeded to be published as book version.

And so, if you are able to access "Shousetsuka ni narou" using your PC or smartphone, it's possible for you to take a look at the web version "Seirei Gensouki" anytime.

Although, "After reading web version, the necessity or enjoyment of reading the published version will be gone" isn't true by all means, and "it's better to read web version first in order to enjoy the published version" also isn't true at all.

In order for the readers to be able to enjoy reading no matter whether you read the published version or the web version first, the

published version of "Seirei Gensouki" came from revising the content of web version "Seirei Gensouki" (or rather almost all is newly rewritten, more specifically the storyline that become the foundation is following the flow of the web version, I added various scenes, changed the way the event happened, increased the turn of the heroine, altered a part of the setting, etc...).

And so, it will be more favor than the author deserved if you readers can enjoy both the published version and web version.

Also, before the allocated pages ran out, there is something that I wish to convey no matter what. I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you in regard to "Seirei Gensouki", including for the future.

First to all the readers regardless of the web version or the published version, truly thank you very much for reading this humble work with pleasure! Without all of you dear readers, "Seirei Gensouki" won't be able to become "Seirei Gensouki" like now.

All of the proofreaders who checked the minute misspelling, mistyping, and the language presentation, as well as everyone in the bookstore who advertise and sell this book in the store, my deepest thanks.

Also, to all the people involved in the editorial department of HJ Bunko, as well as Hobby Japan, my many thanks for exerting yourself greatly for the publication of "Seirei Gensouki"!

I'm especially thankful from the bottom of my heart to N, the editor in charge of me! I am really in your debt for your gentle guidance to the new author who was completely nervous at the first meeting and didn't know left from right, and for your effort behind the scene in various things for the sake of the book. I'll be in your care from here on too!

And then, to the illustrator in charge of this novel, Riv-sama. I'm really thankful to you for gracefully decorating "Seirei Gensouki" with numerous amazing illustrations. The height of the quality that was

obsessed to even the details (especially the background and clothing) that even I the author didn't pay attention to, and then the cuteness of the heroines with their abundant expression, they made me all smiles everyday. I'm grateful from my heart!

Well then, I wish to finish the afterword around here. It will be a blessing for me if everyone can accompany this work from many years to come in the future too. The publication of volume 2 is also decided already, so I pray that we will be able to meet there too!

*A certain day at August 2015*

***Kitayama Yuuri***